

# WRITINGS OF COTY PINCKNEY

by Coty Pinckney

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*A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Coty Pinckney, compiled for study and devotional reading.*

51 Chapters

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## **00.00. Pinckney, Coty - Library**

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Pinckney, Coty - Library Pinckney, Coty - Oh, No! Not Leviticus!

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## 01.01. Oh, No! Not Leviticus!

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Oh, No! Not Leviticus! A sermon by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, April 26, 1998

What is your favorite book of the Bible? One of the gospels, perhaps Mark or John? Or the tale of the rapid spread of the early church told in Acts? Those who delight in a logical presentation of the Christian message might choose Romans, while others love the complete range of human emotion expressed in the Psalms.

Given the compelling story of the fall of man and God's subsequent steps toward redemption through the lives of the patriarchs, some of you prefer Genesis. The display of God's mighty power in freeing the Israelites from Egypt and speaking to his people at Sinai will attract others to the second book in the Bible, Exodus. But what about the third book of the Bible? If Leviticus is your favorite book, would you please raise your hand? Is there no one? Well, that's ok; I have never known anyone to say that Leviticus is their favorite book.

Indeed, many people would say quite the contrary. Those of you who have tried to read through the Bible cover to cover find Leviticus to be the first big challenge. Some give up in the middle of this book.

Well, this morning we begin a series of sermons on this relatively unpopular book. So let's begin by facing the accusers: Why is Leviticus so unpopular?

Many readers object that this book focuses on: A sacrificial system which is no longer relevant, a priesthood which is no longer in existence, and laws which are no longer binding. The book, in sum, is thought to be out of date, of only historical interest to 20th century man.

Other readers simply feel uncomfortable. Indeed, if Leviticus were made into a movie, it would have to be labeled, "Adult Themes." This book is full of discussion of sex and violence, blood and death, menstrual flows and seminal emissions. It even talks about eating locusts! So some readers feel squeamish, as these issues come up almost every page. So should I just stop now and pick another book? Would we be better off just ignoring Leviticus? Why should we take the time and effort to study this book?

First, Leviticus is part of Scripture. Many of us like to quote 2 Timothy 3:16-17 :

All Scripture is God-breathed, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be fully equipped for every good work.

Paul tells us here that Leviticus is God-breathed. Leviticus is profitable for us. We may not be able to see this as we read through the book in a cursory manner, but, as with all Scripture, we need to take it on faith that God will use His word to bless us and build us up. But we can say more. Remember the prophecy about Jesus in Psalms 118:1-29? The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone.

Stone cutters would shape the stones and present them to the chief builder, who would examine them to try to find the perfect stone for the corner of the building. The corner stone had to be perfect; if it were not square, the whole building would be off. Yet the builders rejected the very stone which was needed to create a perfect building. Leviticus, I suggest, is like that stone. Or think of yourself standing before a locked door, with untold treasure on the other side. You have a huge ring of keys, hundreds of keys. You look at a particular key, examine the lock, and decide, "This old key can't possibly fit; I'll throw it away." But that very key, the very key you reject, is the only one that can unlock the room full of riches.

I tell you this morning: Leviticus is the key to unlock the riches of the New Testament. A serious study of this wonderful book provides the key to understanding four concepts central to living the Christian life. Let's consider these one by one. The Concept of Sacrifice

We cannot understand the concept of sacrifice without studying the God-ordained sacrificial system presented in Leviticus.

Let me whet your appetite a bit here: Why did Jesus have to die? What did he accomplish in his death? Most of us here this morning will answer, correctly, that Jesus died as a substitute for us, that Jesus' death saves us from our sins. That is right. But Leviticus brings out the often-ignored truth that the sacrificial system was not only concerned with forgiveness of sin. These offerings, as we shall see, were designed by God to meet our needs for love, for joy, and for peace. All that is in Leviticus.

Furthermore, in Romans 12:1, Paul tells us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. How can we possibly understand Paul's injunction unless we understand the system of animal sacrifices presented here? The Concept of Priesthood

Second, Leviticus describes the priesthood. Why should we be concerned about priests? In part, because Jesus is said to be our High Priest:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God let us hold fast our confession, . . . let us draw near with confidence (Hebrews 4:14; Hebrews 4:16)

What is a high priest? What did Jesus do that made him act like a priest for us? Leviticus opens our eyes to these truths.

Furthermore, not only is Jesus our high priest, but the New Testament tells us that WE ARE PRIESTS! What does this mean? The New Testament alone gives us clues, but the authors presume their readers know the Law contained in Leviticus. So we need to study this book in order to understand our role as priests. The Concept of Law

Third, Leviticus contains much of God's Law given to the Israelites. Recall Jesus' saying in the Sermon on the Mount: Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18) So we need to study this book in order to understand the Law. And we need to ask ourselves how Jesus fulfilled the Law, and in what sense these laws are still relevant for us. The Concept of Holiness In addition to sacrifice, priesthood, and law, Leviticus helps us to understand holiness. Now, we have

a hard time with the term, 'holy'. When you think of someone who is holy, what image comes to mind? Perhaps someone with his nose up in the air, someone who thinks he is better than everyone else. Or perhaps a mild-mannered person who is always spaced-out, so spaced-out that he'll walk right into a ditch. Or perhaps your idea of a holy person is someone with a constantly sour face, someone who enjoys telling everyone else what not to do. But that is not the biblical concept of holiness at all.

One might call holiness the central theme of Leviticus. Four times in this book God says something like, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44-45, Leviticus 19:2, Leviticus 20:7, Leviticus 20:26). Leviticus explains this grossly-misunderstood concept, and emphasizes the importance of holiness. We come to understand the holiness of God, and what holiness means for us by reading this book.

Let me give you a hint of what is coming here. Note that the root of the English word "holy" is the same as the root of the word "whole." To be holy is to be a whole person, to be what you are intended to be, to have your act together. Leviticus tells us how to be whole persons. So we can reject the arguments of those who say this book is irrelevant to us. The concepts of sacrifice, priesthood, law, and holiness are all central to our Christian walk; these are the themes of the book of Leviticus.

Permit me now to give you an example of a New Testament passage that will come alive to you after gaining a deeper understanding of these concepts. The entire book of Hebrews is one example, but here this morning let's consider one of my favorite passages, 1 Peter 2:4-25 And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," 8 and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. 9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. (NASB, italic emphasis added)

Holiness. Priesthood. Sacrifices. They are all here. All of 1 Peter, and particularly this passage, comes alive with startling clarity when we gain a deeper understanding of these central concepts. So we have determined WHY we should study Leviticus. The next question, then, is How to study this book.

### How to Study Leviticus

Interpreting Leviticus is somewhat more challenging than interpreting, say, Ephesians. Although Ephesians was written almost 2000 years ago, Paul wrote it to people much like us. These people were for the most part Gentiles, they came to God through Jesus, they lived in a society which, as

a whole, rejected their faith. Paul's commands to the Ephesians to a very large extent are directly applicable to us today. But Leviticus is very different. Jesus came to this world and died long after the writing of this book, fulfilling the pictures contained therein. The sacrificial system is not to be instituted today. We do not need to ordain priests in the manner described in Leviticus today. Instead, the sacrificial system and the priesthood offer us pictures of the true spiritual reality we know today. So our task in approaching this book is to establish a consistent hermeneutic we can use for interpretation.

Now "hermeneutic" is a big word. Let me assure you that Herman Yutick is not the short, bald-headed owner of the New York Deli at the corner of 39th and Broadway. "Hermeneutic" simply means a system of interpretation.

I would like to suggest that interpreting Leviticus is rather similar to interpreting Jesus' parables. Think of the parable of the farmer sowing the seeds. If we're not farmers, the lesson that we should plant seeds in good soil instead of in rocky places or beside the road is not relevant. But if we think of the meaning of the seed, and the meaning of the different types of ground, the story is very relevant to our spiritual lives. In a similar way, we must examine the pictures found in Leviticus, and determine what the pictures represent, in order to see the riches God has for us. So this is our hermeneutic. First, we will take it on faith that the entire book is profitable. Our task is to figure out how it is profitable. To accomplish this, we will begin by asking,

(1) Is this passage or verse a picture of New Testament spiritual truth? If it is, is that its only importance? If this answer is yes, once we have determined the meaning of the picture, our interpretation is finished. As an example, consider the burnt offering. Next week we will discuss what each of the elements of the burnt offering represents. Since we know that Christ's sacrifice is completely sufficient, we know that we are not to offer such literal sacrifices today. Once we understand the pictures, we are done.

(2) For some passages, however, we may not be confident that God is only giving us a picture of spiritual truth. In these cases, we need to ask ourselves, Why did God give this verse/passage to the Israelites? Is the command reflective of God's moral nature, and therefore one we need to follow? Did he want them to be different from the people around them? If so, is the specific command relevant for us today, so that we might be different? Did God give the command to them for health reasons? If so, is it relevant today? If we conclude that the specific command is not relevant for us, we must ask, What is the principle behind the commands of God? How does the principle apply to us? As an example, Leviticus 19:19 says the Israelite are not to wear clothes made from two types of material mixed together. We need to ask ourselves, What picture of spiritual truth is contained in this command? What is the principle behind the command? And then we can ask, is the command still relevant? In this particular case, God wants to Israelites to set themselves apart from the people of the land, the Canaanites. So, for us, the specific command is no longer relevant, but the central theme -- being holy, being devoted to God, being in the world but not of the world -- still holds. This will be our approach to the book. Having now answered why and how we should study this book, let us consider WHAT we will study in Leviticus.

What is in Leviticus?

Let's remind ourselves of the background to Leviticus. Remember what God says to the Israelites at Sinai? if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' (Exodus 19:5-6) And the people reply, both here in Leviticus 19:1-37 and in Leviticus 24:1-23, after they have heard God speak the 10 commandments, All that the LORD has spoken we will do!

God is telling the Israelites, "If you do all that I say, if you keep these commandments perfectly, you shall be holy, you all shall be priests." And they say, "Sure, we can do that. We will be obedient." Could they do it? How long did it take for them to disobey? Remember, only days later they were worshipping a golden calf, explicitly violating one of the very commandments they promised to obey.

God knew they could not live up to law, and he never intended to save them through their keeping the law. What, then, was the purpose of the law, if not to give Israel a standard of perfection they could achieve? Paul puts it this way in Galatians: the law was our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. (Galatians 3:24 AV) The purpose of the law was never to save, but to be our schoolmaster, our tutor, our pedagogue, to teach us about Christ, and to turn us over to him. God always knew that man would not obey the law, that man by himself was so stained by Adam's sin that he cannot live a perfect life. Knowing this, God in his mercy set up his plan of salvation to deal with man's needs, to deal with man's imperfections. From the very beginning God's plan of salvation included the sacrifice of his son. Remember, back in Genesis 3:1-24 God promises that Eve's seed would crush Satan's head. But God sets up the sacrificial system to serve as a series of illustrations, a series of pictures of what Jesus would accomplish on the cross. So Leviticus is a picture of the New Covenant in the midst of the description of the Old Covenant; Leviticus is New Testament truth in the midst of the Old Testament.

Consider now the outline of the book itself. We can divided Leviticus roughly into two sections. The first sixteen chapters contain God's provision for meeting man's needs. The last eleven chapters refer to God's standard for man to live by. We can think of the first section as describing God's grace, and the second section as describing mans' appropriate response to that grace.

Leviticus 1:1-17, Leviticus 2:1-16, Leviticus 3:1-17, Leviticus 4:1-35, Leviticus 5:1-19, Leviticus 6:1-30, Leviticus 7:1-38 describe the five different types of offerings. These offerings are God's plan for dealing with our needs: Our need for love, our need for joy, our need for peace, our need for forgiveness, and our need for restoration of relationships. In each case, the picture helps us to see how Jesus Christ fills those needs.

Leviticus 8:1-36, Leviticus 9:1-24, Leviticus 10:1-20 describe the priesthood. We need helpers in the midst of life's difficulties, and the priests play that role. This section tells us the necessary qualifications of those helpers, giving us a picture both of Jesus as our High Priest, and each of us as a priest serving others.

Leviticus 11:1-47, Leviticus 12:1-8, Leviticus 13:1-59, Leviticus 14:1-57, Leviticus 15:1-33 describe different aspects of holiness, while Leviticus 16:1-34 lays out regulations for celebrating Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On this day, the people respond to God's provision, acknowledging their inadequacies and God's gracious provision for meeting every need.

Leviticus 17:1-16, Leviticus 18:1-30, Leviticus 19:1-37, Leviticus 20:1-27, Leviticus 21:1-24, Leviticus 22:1-33, Leviticus 23:1-44, Leviticus 24:1-23, Leviticus 25:1-55, Leviticus 26:1-46, Leviticus 27:1-34 then constitute the second major section of the book, detailing God's standard for our performance. Note the order here: God's provision always precedes God's commands! God never gives us as Christians a command without providing us with the resources necessary to carry out the command. God is not saying, "This is the law: Do it or die!" Rather, God is saying, "You are weak, apart from me you can do nothing. Remember what happened at Sinai. I know your weakness and your failures, but I have made full provision for them. You now have the ability to live lives worthy of your calling. So be holy!"

Note just a few highlights of this section.

First, the early chapters emphasize the importance of blood. New life requires death of the old life, of the old ways. God's plan of salvation is not to reform us, but for us to die to what we once were, and to live in newness of life. Thus the importance of blood.

Second, these chapters stress our need to depend on God if we are to be pure and whole.

Third, purity and holiness are essential if we are to be effective agents for him.

And, finally, the book closes with our response to God, our vows to him.

Conclusion In conclusion, let us return to the central theme of Leviticus:

Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine. (20:24, NASB) Remember also the phrase we read earlier from 1 Peter: "A people for God's own possession."

God is saying, "You are special to me. You are dearly beloved by me. You are MINE, I chose you, knowing all your needs, knowing all your problems, knowing what it will take to perfect you -- and I have determined to perfect you! Here is the way to be whole, here is the way to become what you are intended to be, here is the power right now to get your act together. All your needs are met in ME, and I give you NOW all you could ever desire. TRUST ME. KNOW ME. FOLLOW ME. BE HOLY, BE LIKE ME, BE CHRISTLIKE." This is God's plan, God's offer to us. Won't you accept it? Here is all you ever wanted or will want -- true love, true joy, true peace -- Won't you reach out and accept it?

Let us pray: Our dear Lord and Father, we are truly YOURS. Anyone who receives Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is your child, and you guarantee that you will bring that person to perfection in yourself. Thank you for this great plan of salvation, instituted by you from the beginning. Thank you for the wonderful pictures of that plan included here in this book of Leviticus. May we dedicate ourselves to studying it, and may you open our eyes to its incredible riches.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 4/26/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## 01.02. The Need to Belong (Lev\_1:1-17)

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The Need to Belong A sermon by Coty Pinckney on Leviticus 1:1-17, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, May 3, 1998

Those of you who have heard me preach before know I frequently begin with a question. This morning, we'll play Jeopardy: I'll give you the answer, and you give me the question. Hint: This is actually the correct answer to a Poli Sci examination question from my college days (which my children say was eons ago):

Here is the answer: A sense of belonging to a group.

What is the question? The question on my Poli Sci exam was, What is nationalism? But this morning I would like to suggest that another question with the same answer would be, Name one of our basic human needs.

Think of all that people do for the sake of nationalism, from devoting themselves to the common good, to genocide of those different from themselves! All this results from what? A feeling, a sense of belonging.

We as human beings have a strong need to belong. This expresses itself in some positive or innocuous ways, such as:

Devotion to family

Devotion to job, work

Involvement in support groups

Becoming the fan of a team

But this need also expresses itself in terrible and ugly ways:

Warfare

Racism

Involvement in cults

All of us want to be part of a group, to be loved and appreciated by others, to be part of something bigger than ourselves. And, indeed, when we don't satisfy this need to belong, when we feel rejected by the groups we want to join, we can suffer deep depression, and even decide life is not worth living

We see people searching for this all the time, trying by the way they dress, the words they use, the credentials they seek, to become a part of a group. Is it wrong for us to feel this way? Is it wrong for us to want to belong?

No. This desire to belong is a basic human need, an expression of our humanity. We need to be loved, we need to know who we are. But like most good things, we twist and distort this basic need, we manipulate this need in others, so that we end up hating those not in our group, so that we lose all sense of proportion when we are rejected by a group.

Like sexuality, this need for belonging is GOD-GIVEN -- and like sexuality, there is a GOD-GIVEN way to have this desire fulfilled.

How is this need to be fulfilled? God tells us the answer here in Leviticus. We belong to GOD, we are HIS PEOPLE, we are a people for his own possession. Recall Leviticus 20:26 from our discussion last week:

You are to be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy, and I have set you apart from the peoples to be MINE.

We will never find our fulfillment in any other group, we will never satisfy our desire to belong anywhere else but with God. And God provides a picture of this in the first of the five offerings, the burnt offering.

Last week we began a series of studies on Leviticus. Now I didn't choose this book because I heard a great clamor of voices chanting, "We want Leviticus! We want Leviticus!" Indeed, this book is one of the least popular in the Bible, a stumbling block for those trying to read all the Scriptures. On the surface it seems to be only a set of regulations that have been superceded by the coming of Jesus. Yet when we prayerfully consider this book, knowing that ALL Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for us, we find that Leviticus is the key to understanding much of the New Testament. Leviticus opens our eyes to:

the meaning of Jesus' sacrifice,

our role as priests of the New Covenant,

God's requirement that we be holy.

So these are the reasons WHY we should study Leviticus.

We also asked the question, HOW. Because Leviticus is a series of pictures foreshadowing the full truth to be revealed in Christ, it requires a somewhat different type of study than, say, one of the letters of Paul. Instead, I suggested that the proper method of approach is more akin to studying Jesus' parables. Our primary question will be whether each chapter or verse is a picture of New Testament truth, to see how it may shed light on that truth.

Finally, we closed last week by answering the question WHAT? WHAT are the main topics in Leviticus? We noted that the first half of the book details God's provision for meeting man's needs; the second half in general describes God's requirements for holy living. The order is not accidental; God never gives a command without giving us the provision for fulfilling that command. The first section of Leviticus, the first set of provisions for dealing with man's needs, concerns five offerings. This morning we will examine some of the common elements in these offerings, and then consider the truths revealed to us by the first offering, the whole burnt offering. And we will see that in the burnt offering, God pictures in a beautiful way his provision for meeting our need to

belong. As in the verse we quoted above, God is saying, "You are MINE, You belong to me! Your need to belong will be fulfilled only in me. You are my own dear possession, and with me you will find true love and care." So turn in your Bibles with me to Leviticus chapter 1:

1 Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock. 3 ¶ 'If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. 4 'And he shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. 5 'And he shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 6 'He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. 7 'And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 'Then Aaron's sons, the priests, shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. 9 'Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. (NASB)

We will look at some of these confusing details in a moment, but first let us consider common characteristics of all five offerings. You'll be happy to hear that I won't read the first seven chapters in their entirety, but I do encourage you to do so this week.

Common Elements in the Five Offerings (1) God ordained all five offerings from the tabernacle

God had given the law at Sinai, and the people of Israel had replied, "All that you have commanded we will do!" They agreed to that covenant -- yet within days they grossly violated the very commands they had heard God speak.

Now, was their disobedience a surprise to God? Of course not. God never intended the Israelites to deserve to stand before him by perfect obedience to the Law. Neither does he expect us to stand before him on that basis. Similarly, we cannot simply tell people how to behave and expect that they will do so. Our sin nature is too strong for that. Instead, as Paul writes in Galatians, the Law became our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, to show us our need for Christ. So God, knowing human weakness, provided for that weakness with these sacrifices and offerings, which foreshadow Jesus' death on the cross. Why did he ordain these offerings in this particular spot? Because the tabernacle is God's picture of his living among us, of his power within us, and these offerings symbolize God's provision for meeting our human needs. We sometimes refer to these first five books of the Bible as the Law, but here God is speaking of his Grace, of his unmerited favor toward us, of his provision for dealing with our sin.

(2) God required that the offerings follow a prescribed pattern.

While giving us the offerings in order to meet our needs, God did not say, "Oh, I'd like you to approach me this way, but you can make any changes in the methods you deem appropriate. Just be sincere." Quite the contrary. God gives a long list of requirements, and the Israelites were to be careful to follow all of them. Indeed, chapter 10 describes how God kills two of Aaron's sons who offer "strange fire," fire which was not offered in the prescribed way.

All these requirements emphasize that we come before God on the basis of His grace. If we deserved to come before him, then we could negotiate terms. But we don't. Unless God makes a special provision, our status before Him is hopeless. We owe him a fortune, and if he is going to forgive that debt, he can name the terms. Here in Leviticus, he names those terms. For us on this side of the cross, these requirements picture the fact that Jesus is the only way. We can't argue with God and say that we are really pretty good people, or that we just didn't quite understand his word. The only way we can approach God, the only way we can be freed from sin power and penalty, is to receive Jesus, to believe in His name.

Let us now consider the similarities among the requirements for the five offerings.

First, there is a selection procedure for the offering. God does not accept just anything the Israelites bring, but prescribes what is appropriate. One common element in the selection is that the offering must have no defect. A grain offering must be perfect, fine flour; an animal must be without blemish. The offering must have value to the person giving it, or it is not worthy of being presented to God.

What about you? In your offering of your time, energy, and resources to God, are you offering that which is perfect? Or instead, are you offering whatever time is leftover, and the money you don't really need? Do you put the same degree of effort into your ministry as you put into your job, your studies, or your sport? In the book of Malachi, God speaks harshly to the priests, complaining that they are offering him sacrifices that they would never consider offering to the Persian governor. Our devotion to the tasks God gives us should be at least as great as if we were working for the governor of our state or the President of the country. God is much greater than any governor!

Second, note that God specifies the sex of the animal to be sacrificed. In some cases a male is specified, in other cases a female, and in other cases God says either can be offered -- but he chooses. Why? The male is a picture of the leader, the initiator, while the female is a picture of a responder, a follower. So the sex of the animal to be offered helps us to understand the purpose of the offering. These pictures are partly based on the differences in the sexual organs between male and female, and partly based on the tasks given to male and female in Genesis 2:1-25. Now, note that each of us before God plays both "female" and "male" roles. All of us are the bride of Christ, yet we are named sons, heirs together with Christ.

Third, note that the species of the animal to be offered frequently is left open. Bulls, sheep, goats, and birds are all acceptable to God in certain circumstances. This is in part God's provision for the poor. Some persons could not possibly afford to kill a perfect bull for a burnt offering, but God values their devotion as much as the devotion of a rich person. Even while God is detailing specific requirements, he leaves open the type of animal -- because his concern is primarily with the heart of the believer. The item sacrificed should be valuable to the offerer -- but because those making the offerings differ in economic status, the type of offering varies also. In addition to being a provision for the poor, God's accepting different animals also pictures his acceptance of all of us, different as we may be. We all belong to him; he says to each of us, "You are MINE!" We differ in abilities, in gifts, in ethnicity, in education, in health, in age, in every way -- but God loves us all, he accepts us all, he has a perfect plan to meld us all together into his perfect body and bride. So for each of the five types offerings, God specifies a selection process for the item to be offered. The second common requirement for the four offerings involving animals is that the giver identifies

himself with the animal to be killed. In each case, the offerer lays his hands on the animal prior to killing it. This picture becomes more vivid when we consider the third common requirement, that the animal must be killed. Now, think back to the passage we just read: Who kills the animal? The answer is given in Leviticus 1:4-5; the offerer kills the animal. The priest does not do the killing, but the person who brings this precious animal to the tabernacle also must kill it.

There are two pictures here. First, by identifying myself with the animal and then killing it, I am sacrificing myself, I am dying. Dying to self, dying to everything that draws me away from God. I put myself to death.

Paul puts it this way in Galatians: For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. (Galatians 2:19-20, NASB)

I am crucified. I no longer live. Christ is in me instead, and I live by him, through him, and for him. All this is pictured in these ancient offerings. But there is a second picture here. The perfect animal is a picture of whom? Who died so that we might live? The animal also pictures Jesus. So my killing of the animal is a picture of my killing Jesus.

What a vivid picture of this profound spiritual truth! I have to slit the throat of this beautiful animal, I have to watch as the lifeblood issues forth, I am responsible for the death of this perfect sacrifice -- I am responsible for Jesus' death! Even if no one else in the world had ever sinned, my sins alone would require Jesus to die. I killed Jesus Christ. The fourth common requirement for the offerings is some act of consecration. The act differs from offering to offering: The blood is sprinkled, or poured out; blood is sometimes put on parts of the body; part or all of the sacrifice is burned; the remains are taken to a particular place. We will deal with the pictures as we consider the individual offerings.

Fifthly and finally, for all the offerings except the burnt offering, there is some celebration of renewed fellowship after the act of consecration. We'll consider later today why there is no act of celebration in this one case. So God ordained these offerings from the tabernacle, and then specified certain requirements for all the offerings, including the selection of the sacrifice, identification with the animal, the killing of the animal by the offerer, an act of consecration, and acts of celebration. The Burnt Offering

Let us now turn our attention to the specifics of the burnt offering. Let's first identify the specifics of the burnt offering, and then consider the meaning:

Selection of the Animal: God accepts bulls, goats, sheep, and birds as burnt offerings, as we noted earlier. The animal must be male. The laying on of hands and the killing of the animal by the offerer follow the common pattern. The act of consecration is to burn the animal completely. There is no act of celebration.

Furthermore, consider Leviticus 6:9-13 :

9 "Command Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the law for the burnt offering: the burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire on the altar is to be kept burning on it. . . 12 It shall not go out, but the priest shall burn wood on it every morning;

and he shall lay out the burnt offering on it, and offer up in smoke the fat portions of the peace offerings on it. 13 'Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar; it is not to go out. (NASB) As we learn elsewhere, in addition to the freewill burnt offerings prescribed in Leviticus 1:1-17, the priests were to offer burnt offerings for the people of Israel as a whole every morning and evening. And the fire was never to go out, it was to continue days, weeks, months, years, decades, and centuries.

What does all this mean? What is the special meaning of the burnt offering?

One hint is provided in Leviticus 1:3, which reads in the NASB, "He shall offer it ... that he may be accepted before the LORD." The real key, though, is that all of the offering is burned, all of the offering is consumed in the fire. I identify with this animal, and then I kill it and burn it up completely before the Lord. Furthermore, not only do I burn the animal, but the burning produces "a soothing aroma before the Lord."

Here the Israelites are acting out their position before God. They are the animal; they belong to God completely -- every bit of them belongs to God. God chose them to be his, to belong to him -- God loved them as his very own, not because of anything special about them, but simply because he loved them.

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but because the LORD loved you (Deuteronomy 7:6-8 NASB)

Just so with us. God accepts us, God loves us, God chose us as his very own possession, he bought us and redeemed us by the blood of Christ, so that we are not our own. We belong to him.

Here is the answer to all our longing to belong, our desire to be a part of a group. God has loved us with a love beyond compare, he has declared that we are part of his family. We don't need to try to impress others, or live up to others' expectations; we don't need to prove to any group of humans that we are worthy of their attention, or that they need to include us in their group. For we are God's people, we belong to Him, and nothing will ever separate us from His love. And the fire never goes out!

There must be a continuous recognition that we belong to him. Every minute of every day, we need to remember to say to ourselves, "I am a child of God, I am accepted and loved by the Creator of the universe, he gave himself for me and his love for me is boundless!" So why is there no act of celebration? Because the offering never ends! The offering is continuous, and the offering IS the celebration! The offering is the Israelite's picture of who they are before God -- totally his, loved by Him, possessed by Him. And to acknowledge that love is a great celebration.

Finally, let us consider the sex of the animal. Why does God designate that the burnt offering must be a male? Since this is a picture of God's possession of us, why not a female, representing our role as the bride of Christ?

I believe the clue here is found back in Genesis. What was the purpose of man from the beginning?

28 And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28 NASB)

God gives man dominion over the earth. His task is to rule over it. But if man tries to exercise this dominion apart from God, he fails. The burnt offering was a male, for it is in our capacity as God's supreme creation on this earth, God's designated rulers of this earth, that we come before God. We are saying, "God, we cannot complete this task without you. You created us to rule, to tend, to care for this creation -- and it is only by belonging to you fully that we can accomplish this task."

Conclusion So who are you? To whom do you belong?

I hope that you do have a family which loves you and cares for you, showing you that you are one of them.

I hope you have or will have a husband or wife with whom you can share an essential unity, to whom you will belong.

I hope your school, or your workplace, or your sports team gives you a sense of being part of something bigger than yourself, where your efforts are appreciated and serve to further a common goal.

But, you know, our families, our spouses, and all human organizations will let us down. None of these will ever fill our deepest need to belong.

Because God created us to belong to HIM! "You are MINE!" says the Lord, "A People for my own possession."

I assure you this morning that God loves you with love far beyond any human love. That God is waiting with open arms for you to come to him and say, "I recognize that I am yours, that you have died for me, that you accept me."

If you don't know this love and acceptance, you can. John writes,

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12 NIV)

Receive Jesus as your Lord; believe that he died for you; acknowledge that you need him if you are ever to belong, if you are ever to fulfill your deepest desires; then offer yourself fully and completely to him, dying to self, so that he might make you whole.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord and Father, you who have loved us with love beyond measure, you who chose us to be specially yours out of all your creation: Thank you for this beautiful image of your complete acceptance of us. You know, our Father, how we are beset with doubts about our worthiness; you know, our God, how often we feel worthless, rejected, despised, and forsaken by those we thought were our friends and loved ones; you know, our Father, the pain we have experienced through those who have failed to live up to their promises; and, O God, you know the pain we have inflicted on others when we have rejected and failed them.

Forgive us for these sins, O God. And thank you so much that we can come before you, knowing that we are totally yours, that you accept us just as we are, and that you promise to perfect us, to fulfill our potential by your power. May we keep in mind the fire that never goes out, the continual burning of this offering, as day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute you infuse us with your power -- and make us yours. Amen and amen.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 5/3/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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### 01.03. Your Present to God (Lev\_2:1-16)

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Your Present to God A sermon by Coty Pinckney on Leviticus 2:1-16, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, May 10, 1998

Please look at the person sitting on your right. Notice his or her size, build, and length of arms. Now, imagine what that person looked like moments after birth:

Bloody

Wrinkled skin

Eyes squinting

Short little arms that can't reach to the top of his head

Rolls of fat in the legs

Unable to speak, unable to walk or even crawl

But well able to cry as he takes his first gulps of air, well able to demand that his needs be met. That's how the person sitting next to you started life. That is how you started life. So who took care of this helpless infant, this bundle of fat?

Most of you, moments after birth, were wrapped and given to your mother to hold. And she looked into your eyes, and loved you deeply from her heart; she knew you belonged to her, and she committed herself to giving herself to you.

Now, she didn't live up to that commitment perfectly. But through the years,

she cleaned your messes,

she got out of bed in the middle of the night to comfort you,

she sat up with you when you were sick,

she helped with schoolwork,

shared walks and bike rides with you,

talked of your future,

welcomed your friends.

She watched you grow, perhaps to reach her height, and then she found herself looking up to the tiny infant she nursed at her breast.

She helped prepare you to leave home, and then could hardly stand to see you go. In all this, she showed you her love. You were hers as an infant, and in some sense you still are hers, you still belong to her: flesh of her flesh, bone of her bones.

I ask you: How do you respond to that love? How should you respond to a love that gives of itself, a deep love from the heart? How should you respond to the person who held you and nourished you and watched out for you when you were completely helpless -- when, without such love and care, you could not have survived?

I ask you that this morning not to make you feel guilty on Mother's Day -- although I'd be pleased if some of you turn to your mothers right now and thank them, or leave here after the service and call them. But I raise these issues this morning because God has loved us with a similar love. Recall our discussions last week about the burnt offering -- How the burnt offering pictures our belonging to God, our acceptance by Him. God tells us, "You are MINE, You belong to me! I have chosen you to be for my own possession. You are wholly mine!"

God knows of our need to belong, of our need to be loved. And our mothers are one provision God made to satisfy that need. Yet their love alone can never satisfy the need completely. We will never be completely satisfied until we turn to God to fulfill that need -- for he will never fail us, he will never let us go, his love is strong and deep, from everlasting to everlasting; his love will overcome all our failures, all our faults, all our frights; in the end His love will perfect us together with all the church, so that we might be a glorious creation, alive in his presence forevermore. So the burnt offering pictures our belonging to God, and God's acceptance of us -- completely and continually, as the fire never goes out. And just as we must consider how we should respond to our mother's love, so we must consider how we should respond to God's love. Our proper response is pictured beautifully in the second offering described in Leviticus, the grain offering. In this offering, God shows us that we should respond to his love by offering our entire lives back to him. And he shows that a life holy and acceptable to God is not the result of our naturally sweet disposition; there should be no self-glorification, no pride in our status before God. Instead, a life offered to God needs to be characterized by prayer, infused with the Holy Spirit, and based on the promises of God. This is the picture of the grain offering, which we will examine today. So please turn in your Bibles with me to Leviticus 2:1-16. Recall that these five offerings at the beginning of the book are God's provision for dealing with man's weaknesses, for filling man's needs. We'll read Leviticus 2:1-3 :

1 'Now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour, and he shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it. 2 'He shall then bring it to Aaron's sons, the priests; and shall take from it his handful of its fine flour and of its oil with all of its frankincense. And the priest shall offer it up in smoke as its memorial portion on the altar, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. 3 'And the remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons: a thing most holy, of the offerings to the LORD by fire. (NASB)

Recall that last week we outlined the basic characteristics of all offerings. For each offering, God details how to select the item to be offered, then instructs the offerer to identify with the offering, and kill the offering if it is an animal. The killing is followed by an act of consecration, and finally by an act of celebration. As the only offering that does not involve the killing of an animal, the grain offering is unique. So this morning, we will focus on the first topic, the selection of the offering. And we'll find several interesting criteria laid out by God that open up the meaning of this offering.

God gives us the first clue to the meaning of the offering in the very first verse. If you check your different translations, you will find this offering is called the "meat" offering (since in the early

1600's "meat" simply meant any type of sustaining food), the grain offering, the meal offering, or the cereal offering. But in Hebrew, none of those different words is included in the name of the offering! The first phrase of Leviticus 2:1 in the New American Standard Bible reads: "Now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the LORD . . ." But consider Young's literal translation, which captures the Hebrew well: "When a person bringeth near an offering, a present to Jehovah . . ."

You see the difference? God's title for this offering is, in effect, the Present Offering. This offering is our gift, our present to God. We are told later that it consists of grain, and so most translators have avoided the seemingly redundant name, "Present Offering." But in so doing they have hidden from readers this first, important clue to God's purpose for this offering. The other distinctives in the selection of the offering clarify its meaning.

First, as noted above, the offering is of grain, which in Palestine at this time would be wheat or barley. Several differing forms of the grain are allowed, as you will find if you read the entire chapter. The grain could be:

whole, but crushed and roasted,

flour, ground fine and sifted,

a flat, unsweetened cake, baked in an oven (somewhat like an Indian nan, but unleavened),

a flat, unsweetened pancake, grilled -- rather like a tortilla or an Indian chapati.

In effect, God is saying he doesn't care about the exact form of the grain, but this Present Offering needs to consist of the staple food of the Israelites.

We Americans have a hard time understanding the importance of wheat and barley to the Israelite community. The Israelites -- like the majority of people living in the world today -- consumed more than half of their calories and probably more than % of their protein from their staple food. And if the rains didn't come, or if war interrupted the wheat and barley harvests, there was starvation.

I well remember my first week in western Kenya 21 years ago, when a student questioned me about life in the United States. He asked me, "What is your staple food?" I was puzzled; the idea of a staple food had never occurred to me. I told him our staple was wheat, but that was wrong. The correct answer is that we don't have a staple food; we eat everything, and no one food provides a large percentage of our total calories. But my friends in western Kenya are much like the ancient Israelites: their diet has little variety, as they eat a dough made from cornmeal boiled in water -- ugali -- every meal, every day, 365 days a year. Indeed, the Luhya people in western Kenya have a saying: "If I haven't eaten ugali, I haven't eaten." This puts a whole new meaning to the phrase, "You are what you eat." Many Kenyans are walking ugali -- really! Their hair, their skin, their muscles -- most of their substance at one point in the past was a piece of corn.

Now, the Israelites were similar. For the common Israelite, meat would have been a delicacy, eaten on special occasions but not every day. (For this reason, while they were traveling in the wilderness, unable to plant crops, God provided them with his own special grain-substitute, manna). Wheat and barley, however, they would eat every day, so that to offer grain was to offer themselves, their daily life; it was to offer what they consist of. So the grain offering pictures my

giving my daily life, my usual self to God.

Note that the grain offering is not a picture of our thanking God for providing for our needs. God did command the Israelites to make such an offering, called an offering of first fruits. Whenever they harvested crops, indeed whenever they made a profit in a business, they were to set aside the first portion for God. This offering of first fruits is an acknowledgment that whatever they have belongs to God, that God is the provider of all good gifts. And grain was offered at harvest time as a first fruit offering. But this Present Offering was different, serving a differing purpose in God's plan. The Present Offering pictures me offering all of my daily life to God.

Even though this is a picture of our daily life, the Israelites could not bring any wheat and barley to God. In the rest of Leviticus 2:1-16 God lays out six requirements for the Present Offering: four items that must be included, and two items that must be excluded from the offering. Let us examine each of those in turn:

#### Fine Flour

First, the Present Offering must be made of fine flour. The normal flour would result from grinding the whole grain, together with anything else that may have been in the bag. It thus would include the bran of the grain as well as some impurities, like ground up weevils. Fine flour would differ from normal flour in two ways: it would be ground longer, and thus be consistently fine, and it would be sifted to remove any remaining larger hunks of wheat as well as the bran and impurities.

Now, if the Present Offering pictures the offering of our daily life to God, the requirement of fine flour is a picture of our need to be holy, our need to be whole. Like the flour, God asks for a life that is consistent and balanced, rather than inconsistent and lumpy. He doesn't accept an offering full of stones and weevil parts; he wants a life set apart to him, he wants a life lived up to its potential, as day after day we glorify him. Who can live a life like that? None of us can on our own; God's command, "Be holy, for I am holy" is a demand we cannot meet on our own. But remember, these offerings are God's provision for our weakness. All these offerings point to Jesus as the example for us to follow, the power within us enabling us to live a holy life, and the perfect person with whom we are identified. Jesus did indeed live this perfectly balanced and consistent life; Jesus offered up to God a life with no impurities. And when we receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, we become identified with him, so that we can stand holy (whole) and blameless before God.

#### Frankincense

Second, the flour is to be mixed with frankincense. The priest is to burn this incense completely with a portion of the flour or bread, producing a sweet, pleasing aroma before God.

What does the incense picture? As always, we use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Let us turn briefly to Revelation 4:1-11 and Revelation 5:1-14. Do you remember this vision? The Spirit enables John to see into the very throne room of heaven. God sits on the throne, served by four living creatures who are covered with eyes and wings. These creatures cry out, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!" And twenty-four elders fall down before Him, saying, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being!" God holds a scroll, sealed with seven seals, and an angel calls out, "Who is worthy to open the scroll?" And John

weeps greatly, because neither he nor anyone else in all creation is worthy to open the scroll. But then Jesus, the Lion of Judah, the Lamb who was slain, appears -- He is worthy to open the book. Then we come to Revelation 5:8 : And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Note the incense. God explains for us here that the incense represents our prayers. Now that's a wonderful image, isn't it? Just as the smoke of burning incense rises up, filling a room with its pleasant aroma, so our prayers rise up to God, pleasing him.

Consider also Psalms 141:2 : May my prayer be counted as incense before you; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering. So the incense in the Present Offering pictures prayer in our daily lives. As we offer ourselves to God, we are to have hearts that praise him in all circumstances, lives lived out in constant, conscious dependence upon him. Our contact with the Father is to be continuous -- and this pleases God. When we praise and magnify the Lord, when we turn to Him in the midst of our difficulties, we please Him greatly.

Oil All grain offerings were to include oil. The most elaborate description of this is found in Leviticus 2:5-6 : And if your offering is a grain offering made on the griddle, it shall be of fine flour, unleavened, mixed with oil; 6 you shall break it into bits, and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. Do you recall other times in the Old Testament when oil is used? Remember that Samuel anoints Saul and David as king by pouring oil on their heads. And, as we will find out later in Leviticus, oil is poured on the priests at the time of their consecration.

What does this represent? The oil pictures the Holy Spirit. Samuel was acting out the Holy Spirit coming upon Saul and David for the important task of kingship. Similarly, the priests need the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill their responsibilities before the Lord. Just so, if our lives are to be pleasing to God, they must be characterized by dependence on the Holy Spirit. But look more closely at Leviticus 2:5-6. Do you see how the oil is used in two ways? First, the oil is mixed with the flour, interspersed with the flour, so that the flour and oil cannot be distinguished. Our daily lives are to be infused with the Spirit, so that we are constantly walking in the Spirit, depending on the Spirit. Then, secondly, Leviticus 2:6 tells us that, in addition, they were to pour oil on top of the offering. This is a beautiful picture of our need for special anointing by the Holy Spirit for particular tasks. So our lives are always to be lived in dependence on the Holy Spirit, but we can also pray that He would fill us mightily when, say, we are witnessing, or when we are faced with serious opposition. We can pray that the Lord would so fill us with his Spirit that we would have the exact words to say, that we would have all wisdom and courage to face the opponent. We need the Spirit always mixed in the daily grind of our lives, and we need the Spirit especially when we are faced with our most challenging tasks.

Salt The fourth required element in the Present Offering is salt. Consider Leviticus 2:13 :

Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

We use salt today primarily to flavor our food, but the primary purpose of salt at this time -- and even early in this century -- was as a preservative. Before the age of refrigeration, salting was necessary if one wanted to keep meat more than a couple of days. So salt is a symbol of

permanence.

God does not leave much to our imagination here, as he labels this as "salt of the covenant." Evidently, salt was used at the time of making covenants, again as a symbol of permanence. The covenant was a promise that would last, and salt signified that. So as we offer ourselves to God, we are to be seasoned with salt. This pictures our dependence on God's eternal covenant, his unfailing promises to us, just as it pictures our permanent response to Him. This is not a relationship that we flit in and out of; God has called us to him from the beginning, and his promises never fail; just so, we need to acknowledge that we are His forever, and that our commitment to him is everlasting. So our Present Offering is to include:

fine flour -- the stuff of our very lives;

incense -- our prayers and praise to God;

oil -- the presence of the Spirit;

and salt -- the permanence of the promises.

In addition to these four required items, God forbids the presence of leaven and honey in the offering. Consider Leviticus 2:11-12 :

11 'No grain offering, which you bring to the LORD, shall be made with leaven, for you shall not offer up in smoke any leaven or any honey as an offering by fire to the LORD. 12 'As an offering of first fruits, you shall bring them to the LORD, but they shall not ascend for a soothing aroma on the altar. (NASB)

Leaven The first restricted ingredient is leaven. This is sometimes translated, correctly, as "yeast," but don't think of the tiny brown balls that come out of a Fleischman's envelope. Yeast at this time was sourdough, usually left over from the previous baking. The baker takes the sourdough starter and mixes it with the rest of the dough. As the natural yeast feeds on the starch, it gives off carbon dioxide, causing the bread to puff up and rise. Do you know how to make sourdough starter? Mix milk, sugar, and flour, then put them in a warm place for a couple of days. The yeast which is naturally present in the air breeds in this attractive mixture, causing it to go sour -- and voila, there is your sourdough starter. In the New Testament, Jesus uses the image of yeast both positively and negatively. He compares the spread of the kingdom of God to the spread of the yeast through the dough. A small bit of sourdough starter causes the whole loaf to rise, and flavors the whole loaf with its taste. Just so, we Christians may seem few, but God's kingdom will change the entire world. On the negative side, Jesus says to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. This is explained in different passages as both their teaching and their hypocrisy. In both cases, the idea is similar to the spreading of the kingdom: a little bit of legalism, a little bit of hypocrisy, can flavor your entire life, making it unfit for a sacrifice to God. So leaven pictures the tainting of our lives with what seems to be small, but spoils it entirely. Consider also the action of yeast. Yeast causes the loaf to rise, yeast puffs up the loaf. We need to avoid being puffed up, having pride in ourselves. Even a little bit of pride, of thinking that we deserve what we have, spoils our offering to God. We must come to him completely humble, completely dependent upon God's goodness for our standing before God.

God warns the Israelites of this explicitly in Deuteronomy 8:11-14 :

Beware lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; 12 lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 14 then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (NASB)

We are particularly vulnerable to pride when our lives are going well, when all seems to be on an even keel. Let each of us avoid this yeast of pride, let us avoid being puffed up, and glorify God by lives lived humbly before Him.

### Honey

Finally, Leviticus 2:11 tells us that no grain offering -- indeed, no offering of any type burned in the fire -- is to contain honey. Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with honey -- God reminds the Israelites that honey is to be offered as first fruits, thanking God for his provision. And the dietary restrictions contained in Leviticus 11:1-47 do not forbid the eating of honey. But it is not to be offered up as part of the Present Offering. Why?

Some have suggested that honey is representative of our natural sweetness (if we have any!), of our natural abilities and dispositions. When we present ourselves before God, we do so not on the basis of our natural sweetness, our natural selves, our natural talents. Jesus tells us, "Apart from me you can do nothing." If we come before God depending upon who we are, depending upon our disposition, our talents, then we are saying that there is something worthy of his attention in us. Instead, we are to come before God only in response to His undeserved love. So the Present Offering is a picture of our responding to God's love by offering our daily lives to Him.

### Conclusion

Think back again to your mother: Her love for you, her devotion to you, her sacrifice of herself for you. You belong to her, in a sense; you are hers. That love demands a response. To fail to respond is to fail to understand the depth and nature of her love, to fail to appreciate who she is and what she has done for you. So, today, respond to that love.

God's love for you is yet deeper and more profound than the best mother's love. We need God's perfect love, we need to belong to him.

How will you respond?

Romans 12:1 tells us how to respond. The New American Standard translates this verse:

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. But that last phrase, "which is your spiritual service of worship" could just as well be translated, "which is the logical thing to do." Given the great mercies of God, given His great love for us, given that he has chosen us before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight, the only logical thing to do is to respond! The only logical thing to do is to offer ourselves back to him, to offer him even the daily grind of our lives, to make holy every single thing we do every day, as we glorify him in our lives.

You have a need for God's acceptance and love; you have a need to respond. Present your life to him, all of your self, the very stuff you are made of!

Present him a life bathed in prayer and praise;

Present him a life based on his promises;

Present him a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit;

Present him a life not based on natural sweetness or abilities, but a life lived in dependence upon him, devoted to accomplishing his purposes for you in this world.

This is the grain offering, the Present Offering, the presenting of yourself fully to God. We are to say, "Here I am; I have come to do your will! Take me! Use me for your glory. You have made me to be yours!" Praise God!

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 5/10/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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## 01.04. How Can I Find Peace? (Lev\_3:1-17)

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How Can I Find Peace? A Sermon by Coty Pinckney. Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, May 31, 1998

Brynn Hartman was a woman who, to all appearances, had everything: At 40 years of age, the former model was strikingly beautiful; she had two children, a boy and a girl, aged 9 and 6, whom neighbors describe as loving and happy; her husband, Phil Hartman, was a successful actor and comedian; she had oodles of money, a new boat, their own airplane, a \$1.4 million mansion, fancy cars. In a 1995 interview, Phil stated, "I've succeeded beyond my wildest dreams -- financially and in the amount of fun I have in my life." On Thursday morning this week, Brynn Hartman shot and killed her husband; then, sometime later, while the police were entering her house to investigate, she shot and killed herself.

Said a friend: "They had something everybody dreams of -- and look what happens."

Another friend who had known Phil for 20 years said, "This shows that you can see people and not know the complications behind their lives."

Why did this happen? Why would a woman who, according to the world's standards, had everything, kill her husband and herself? What was her life missing?

While we don't know all the motivations for this murder-suicide, we do know that Brynn Hartman must have been deeply troubled. All her possessions, all her success did not satisfy some need in her life. She had no peace.

How can we find true peace -- true well-being, and wholeness? If we don't have peace, there are several common ways to try to find it. Here are three:

(1) Change your circumstances! We might trade in our wife or our husband for the 1998 model year; change our jobs, start a new career, move to a new town. Or we might try to make more money, to find peace and security by building up our assets.

If that doesn't work or is infeasible, we might

(2) Run away from the problem! This might include forgetting about the problem by using drugs or alcohol, or literally running away from our parents, our spouse, our children, our jobs. And if that doesn't work, we can always take the last option:

(3) Blame someone else, and, ideally, get a good lawyer who can get the courts to agree your problems are this person's fault. But you know, none of these alternatives leads to peace. Oh, all might lead to a temporary easing of our stress and strain, but sooner or later our changed circumstances turn bad once again; we wake from our drunken stupor and find peace is even further from us than before. And blaming someone else, even when we succeed in proving it to others, never satisfies in the end. So how can we find peace?

Several weeks ago we began a series of sermons on the book of Leviticus, this often overlooked gem in the Old Testament. We noted that this book begins with a description of the five sacrifices that God ordains for the Israelites. Each sacrifice represents God's provision for meeting one of our deep needs; each sacrifice displays a different aspect of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. The first sacrifice, the burnt offering, pictures God's loving acceptance of us, of all parts of us. This animal sacrifice was consumed by fire in its entirety, and the fire never goes out on the altar. God chooses us as his own treasured possession; we belong to him. He loves us with a deeper love than we can imagine -- meeting our need to be loved, to be accepted. The burnt offering pictures the first phrase of John 3:16 : "For God so loved the world . . ." The second offering is usually called the cereal or grain offering, but I suggested that a more literal rendering would be the "Present Offering." In this picture, we present back to God the very stuff of which we are made -- our staple food -- as a response to his loving acceptance of us. Just as Jesus presented himself completely to God to be used for His glory, so we must present to God lives characterized by prayer, infused with the Holy Spirit, and based on the promises of God. And when we do this, we find that we have satisfied another basic human need -- the need to respond. God shows his love for us in the burnt offering, and our presenting ourselves back to him is the logical response. And only when we respond in this way do we experience the deep joy that comes from living a life holy and acceptable to God.

Today we come to the third offering, the peace offering. Here God answers the question, How Can I Find Peace? The order of these offerings is not arbitrary; each offering logically follows the one before it. God begins this series of pictures with his acceptance of us, meeting our need to be loved; then he pictures our proper response to that love, which leads to true joy in our lives. But we can belong to God and offer ourselves to him and still be caught up in the trials and difficulties of living in this fallen world. We can know that we belong to him, yet still face trouble and persecution, famine, nakedness, and sword (as Paul says). In the midst of these trials, we need peace -- and God lovingly provides for that need also. So all these sacrifices picture God's provision for meeting our needs through Jesus Christ, and the first three represent God's providing us with Love, Joy, and Peace. So let us turn to Leviticus 3:1-17. As with the burnt offering, several different types of animal can be offered, depending on the wealth of the offerer: a bull or cow, a lamb, or goat. The procedures for each animal are similar; let's read the section on offering a goat, beginning with Leviticus 3:12 :

'Moreover, if his [peace] offering is a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD, 13 and he shall lay his hand on its head and slay it before the tent of meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. 14 'And from it he shall present his offering as an offering by fire to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, 15 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys. 16 'And the priest shall offer them up in smoke on the altar as food, an offering by fire for a soothing aroma; all fat is the LORD'S. 17 'It is a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall not eat any fat or any blood.'" (Leviticus 3:12-17 NASB)

Note that the pattern for this offering is quite similar to that for the burnt offering. The offerer brings the animal to the entrance of the tent of meeting, then lays his hands on the animal. This symbolizes his identification with the animal, so that the sacrifice is both a symbol of the offerer

himself, and a symbol of Jesus. Then the offerer kills the animal himself. The priest does not kill the animal. By this picture, we see that the offerer is offering his life to God, and the offerer symbolically is responsible for the death of Jesus. Next, the priests sprinkle the blood -- representing the life of the animal -- on the altar before God.

All these points are common with the burnt offering. There are several ways that the peace offering is distinctive, however. Of these, this morning I want to emphasize only four.

(1) All Fat is the Lord's In the burnt offering, you recall that the entire animal was consumed in the fire. In the peace offering, God provides detailed instructions concerning the parts of the body that are to be burned. This is primarily the inner fat and kidneys. And Leviticus 3:16 includes this interesting phrase: "All fat is the Lord's."

Now, I've gained a few pounds of fat in the last year; it's good to know all that belongs to the Lord.

What does the fat represent? Why does all fat belong to the Lord?

Today in our culture the word "fat" has negative connotations. Our ideal male and female forms are slender and thin; none of us wants to be called "fat." But for most cultures in most times, this has not been the case. Since most people in the history of our planet have lived in poverty, only the prosperous could become fat. So those who are heavier than average tend to be those who are prosperous.

We found this to be the case in rural Kenya. There, if your wife looks like a fashion model, other men feel sorry for you. To call a child "very fat" is a great compliment to the parents. When a person earns a good bit of money, almost always their girth goes up with their income.

I suspect the Israelites had a similar attitude towards fat. Indeed, the word "fat" is used in the Bible in positive ways. Consider Genesis 45:18, where Pharaoh is speaking to Joseph:

'I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall eat the fat of the land.' (NASB) The "fat of the land" is the best of the land, the produce of the land. Fat is an image of abundance and prosperity.

Consider also Numbers 18:12

All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the fresh wine and of the grain, the first fruits of those which they give to the LORD, I give them to you. (NASB) The word "fat" doesn't appear in our English translations. But the word translated "best" by the NAS and "finest" by the NIV is the same Hebrew word, "fat." Now, wine has no fat in it. But the "fat of the wine" is the best wine, the finest wine. This is why all fat belongs to the Lord; the fat represents the finest parts of our lives. So by offering all fat to the Lord, we are reminded that all good things come from him. Whatever we have that makes life worth living is from God. James puts it this way:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. (James 1:17 NASB) In order to have peace, we need to know that God is the source of all goodness -- and that there is nothing good in our lives except what comes from God. We don't deserve what we have, we did not earn what we have, and thus we need to offer everything that is good back to God in thanksgiving. This is a basic requirement for peace. If we are trying to hold

onto what we have, protect ourselves from losing what we have, then the more we have the more we worry. If we can hold what we have lightly, with confidence that God is sovereign, we are in position to have peace.

(2) **The Offerer Eats the Sacrifice** The second distinctive I want to highlight this morning is that the offerer participates in eating the sacrifice. This is the only offering of which this is true. As we have seen, the fat of the peace offering is burned on the altar; we will see that parts of the animal are given to the priests to eat. But then the rest of the offering may be shared with anyone who is ceremonially clean; that is, with all who belong to God, all who are not tainted with the sin of world. So the peace offerings led to a time of celebration, a time of sharing with others. Indeed, at the time of Israel's four annual feasts, the whole community would come together and slaughter thousands of animals as peace offerings. The entire assembly would then join together in sharing a large "fellowship supper" of meat from these offerings. The peace offering completes the image of the perfect relationship between God and man. In the burnt offering, God says, "You are Mine! You belong to Me!" Then in the Grain or Present Offering, we respond by saying, "All that I am I give to you!" So in the peace offering, we celebrate this relationship between God and man, this relationship that will hold no matter what the future circumstances of our lives might be.

Furthermore, note that the celebration is not limited to the person making the offering, but can be shared with all who are ceremonially clean. God's provision of peace in the midst of our daily lives affects us not only individually, but also corporately. We are the body of Christ, and we all benefit when each one of us is in a right relationship to God, when we can share the love, joy, and peace of God together.

(3) **The Right Thigh and Breast Belong to the Priests** The common people, however, do not consume all the meat of the sacrifice. Turn to Leviticus 7:1-38, where we will begin reading in Leviticus 7:29 :

29 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'He who offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the LORD shall bring his offering to the LORD from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. 30 'His own hands are to bring offerings by fire to the LORD. He shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be presented as a wave offering before the LORD. 31 'And the priest shall offer up the fat in smoke on the altar; but the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. 32 'And you shall give the right thigh to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifices of your peace offerings. 33 'The one among the sons of Aaron who offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat, the right thigh shall be his as his portion. 34 'For I have taken the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the contribution from the sons of Israel from the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons as their due forever from the sons of Israel. (NASB) So the right thigh and the breast belong to the priests. Why? The breast is the meat closest to the heart, the seat of the emotions. The breast, I believe, represents God's love. The thigh, on the other hand, is the strongest muscle in the body, and the right thigh, the thigh on the dominant side of most people, is usually the stronger of the two. The thigh is frequently used as an image of strength in the Bible. For example, consider Revelation 19:16, where John describes his vision of Jesus: And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (NASB) The name is written on his thigh, because the name describes his strength. So these two pieces of meat represent God's love and God's strength. The priest eats them as

God's representative. The truth represented by the thigh and the breast is vitally important for us. We will have no peace unless we have confidence in God's love, and in his mighty power.

Psalms 62:1-12 brings this out beautifully. The whole Psalm is relevant, but here I will read only four verses:

3 How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down-- this leaning wall, this tottering fence? 4 They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse.

11 One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, 12 and that you, O Lord, are loving. In Psalms 62:3-4 the Psalmist is describing his situation. He is under attack, and feels like a wall or fence that is about to fall down. These pseudo-friends are trying to bring down the Psalmist. But he knows that God is his only hope, that God is his only source of rest; he sums up these truths in Psalms 62:11-12. God is strong; the Lord is loving. By focusing on these two attributes of God, the Psalmist finds peace in the midst of this attack on his position. This is fundamental to having peace in the midst of trials, isn't it?

God is loving. Therefore, God is working all to the good. No matter how bad the situation may look, no matter what the circumstances may be, God loves us and wants to work all to our benefit.

God is strong. Therefore, God's love can be effective. A loving God who is not almighty is not much of a comfort; He may want to aid us, but be unable to do so. But our God is loving and almighty. Everything that we fear is under His control. Nothing can overpower him.

We'll come back to this point, but first let me point out the final distinction of this offering:

#### (4) All the Meat Must be Consumed Within Two Days

Look back at Leviticus 7:15 'Now as for the flesh of the sacrifice of his thanksgiving peace offerings, it shall be eaten on the day of his offering; he shall not leave any of it over until morning. 16 'But if the sacrifice of his offering is a votive or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice; and on the next day what is left of it may be eaten; 17 but what is left over from the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burned with fire. 18 'So if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings should ever be eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, and it shall not be reckoned to his benefit. It shall be an offensive thing, and the person who eats of it shall bear his own iniquity.

God details rules for different types of peace offerings; in some cases the meat had to be eaten the same day as the sacrifice, but in all cases the meat must be consumed within two days. No meat of the peace offering could be eaten on the third day.

What does this symbolize?

I believe this symbolizes an important truth: We cannot depend on God's granting of peace in the midst of past trials. If we have confidence in God's love and power today, then we will have peace regardless of our circumstances. And we should celebrate that. But we cannot live on that victory over circumstances. The next day, and the next day, and the day after that we need to renew our confidence in God, to rely on Him again and again, to continue to meditate on His love and His

strength. If we fail to do so, we will lose God's peace, no matter how profound His comfort may have been in the past. This entire passage is summed up beautifully in Romans 8:1-39. Consider here Romans 8:35-39 :

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV) Do you see God's love and power in those verses? The passage begins and ends with the love of Christ and the love of God; where is power? Power is in the word "able." Nothing is able to separate us from the love of God! There is no power that can reach in and grab us away from Him, no circumstance that can overwhelm us. But without this confidence in God's love and power, we can be overwhelmed by our circumstances. We live in a world that seems out of control, where often we don't think we can stand another minute of the pressure and stress. So the world must have seemed to Brynn Hartman -- and without this confidence in a God who loves and a God who is powerful, she tried to find peace in the most extreme way -- by ending her life and the life of her husband. But we see a different reaction to extreme stress in the lives of John and Betty Stam. This couple met while studying at Moody Bible Institute around 1930, when they were in their mid-twenties. Betty had grown up in China, the daughter of long-term missionaries, and returned there in 1931. John followed, and after a period of living in a different part of China, the two were married in October of 1933.

Fourteen months later, communist insurgents under the overall command of Mao Tse Tung captured the town where John, Betty, and their infant child Helen lived. The Stams were arrested. Early on December 8, the soldiers discussed how they would kill baby Helen. A poor Chinese farmer stepped forward, pleading for the child's life. The soldiers replied, "Fine. We won't kill the child -- if you're willing to die in her place!" The farmer agreed. The soldiers shot and killed him. The next morning, the soldiers forced John and Betty to leave their house without Helen. They stripped the couple down to their underwear, and marched them through the town, mocking them. As a crowd formed, the Stams were sentenced to death. A Chinese doctor, until this time a nominal Christian afraid to speak up, made a last-minute plea for their lives; the communists asked if he was a Christian. When he professed Jesus as his Lord, they killed him. Then John and Betty were ordered to their knees. John was beheaded with a sword; Betty grabbed him to hold him and then she too was beheaded. When Betty's parents were informed of her death, they replied by telegraph to the staff of China Inland Mission:

Deeply appreciate your consolation. Sacrifice seems great, but not too great for Him who gave Himself for us. Experiencing God's grace. Believe wholeheartedly Romans 8:28.

Betty Stam's parents knew the truths of Romans 8:1-39 that we read above. They knew that no matter what the circumstances, even in death, we are "more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Furthermore, read what Betty's sister Helen wrote to her bereaved parents:

Dearest Daddy and Mother, you don't need to hear me say how much we love you and are thinking of and praying for you in these days... I have such a radiant pictures of Betty and John standing with their palms of victory before the Throne, singing a song of pure joy because they had given everything they had to their Master, that I cannot break lose and cry about it as people expect. Crying seems to be too petty for a thing that was so manifestly in God's hands alone; but my heart is very, very sore for you. Do you know this type of peace? Do you have confidence in God's unfailing love? I hope that none of us have to encounter the severity of trials faced by John and Betty Stam, her parents, her sister; I hope none of us have to face whatever personal circumstances led Brynn Hartman to her extreme act. But I can guarantee that each one of us here this morning will face difficulties in this life that are unfathomable, trials that we cannot understand, circumstances that on the surface make this world appear to be governed by a malevolent power or random chance rather than by a loving and powerful God. And all of us face small trials on a day to day basis that tempt us to lash out in anger or impatience instead of responding in God's peace. But the message of this Book, the message throughout the Bible, the message of the Peace offering, of Psalms 62:1-12, of Romans 8:1-39 is this: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving.

God provides peace for us through our Lord Jesus Christ in the middle of whatever trial we might face. The world's suggestions for finding peace never work for long; they are only temporary palliatives. You too can have the confidence of the Stams, you too can have the confidence of Paul. Through Jesus we can have this peace that passes all understanding, this peace that is beyond our comprehension. Believe God when he says: Nothing is able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 5/31/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him. The story of John and Betty Stam was taken from one of John Piper's sermons <<http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper86/jp860003.htm>> and an article from Christian History <<http://www.christianity.net/christianhistory/52H/52H034.html>>.

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## 01.05. Blood's Cleansing Power (Lev\_4:1-35)

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Blood's Cleansing Power A sermon on Leviticus 4:1-35 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, June 28, 1998

Imagine this situation: You have a friend who committed her life to Christ several years ago, and for a time seemed deeply concerned about matters of faith. She read her Bible, attended church, took part in other activities, and appeared to grow. But that enthusiasm faded; she turned to other activities, and quit coming to church. You prayed for her, and invited her back several times, but she always had some good reason why she couldn't come.

Now she comes to you, saying she wants to come back to the Lord, but doesn't know if He will take her. She accepted him, then ran from him. She understands the serious nature of forsaking Christ. He accepted her once; can He accept her now, after she turned her back on Him?

What would you say to this friend? Would you say, "Oh, running away from God -- that's no big thing; I've done it lots of times. Just say you're sorry, go to church every week for a few weeks, and everything will be fine." Or would you say, "You did what? You turned your back on God? Hebrews 6:1-20 talks about people like you:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

You have been crucifying the Son of God all over again! You have been publicly disgracing our Savior! Do you think you can do that and then just say you're sorry and expect all to be like it was before?" Would you react to your friend's statement in one of those two ways? The question the girl asks is at heart, "How do I deal with sin? Once I have accepted Jesus as my Savior, is sin important? Need I be concerned with sin in my life? Can sin lead me to lose my salvation?"

Today we return to our series on Leviticus, this misunderstood book of God's grace. Recall from our introductory message on this book that the Israelites had agreed at Sinai that they would follow all the laws God gave them. They respond to hearing the law with the statement, "All that you have commanded we will do." But in a matter of a few hours, the Israelites grossly violated those very commandments. They sinned in a way they had promised not to. Did this end their relationship to God?

Note that this is a situation with close parallels to the question your friend raises: I was in a close relationship with God. I broke the law. Is that then the end of the relationship?

Leviticus provides God's answer to that question. And the answer corresponds to neither of the two suggested above. God's answer is that sin is a very serious matter; we should never take it lightly. But God provides a way out for those who fall into sin -- a way that costs him great sorrow and pain, but a way out. The first five chapters of this book describe five offerings which are God's

provision for dealing with human weakness, God's provision for meeting man's most basic needs. The Israelites, despite their good intentions, could not live up to the law. But God met them at their point of weakness, and instituted these offerings. The burnt offering is the first. In this offering, God says to the people, "You are mine! You belong to me wholly, completely." In the grain offering, or the present offering, we respond by saying, "Yes, I belong to you, and I offer the very stuff of which I am made back to you!" This is a living sacrifice; no death is involved, no life-blood is poured out on the altar. In the peace offering, we celebrate this relationship, even when -- especially when -- the circumstances of our life seem to deny this truth. We depend upon God's love and God's strength, when to natural eyes there is no evidence for a loving and powerful God.

We can also see how Jesus is the embodiment of all these sacrifices. God sending Jesus into the world exemplifies His love, his choosing us as His people, His selecting from every tribe and nation a people for his own possession. Second, Jesus as our representative offered himself fully and completely back to God, making his life a living sacrifice. And Jesus embodies the peace that is ours in the midst of strife, being the perfect expression of God's love and God's strength. So the burnt offering deals with our need to belong, the grain offering with our need to respond, and the third offering with our need for peace in the midst of trials and difficulties. Through these offerings God pictures his gracious granting of love, joy, and peace to our troubled lives. So we see through these offerings that God's relationship to the people of Israel was NOT legal in character; nor is God's relationship to us legal in character. His acceptance is not based upon our living up to a standard. Instead, God himself is the initiator of the relationship. He begins by choosing us, by calling us as his. Then we respond, and God stays right with us through the challenges that face us in this fallen world. But once we present ourselves to God, there are implications for the way we live. He calls us then to live lives worthy of his calling, for he called us for a purpose -- that the world would be blessed through us. God told the Israelites "You shall be holy for I am holy." God tells us, "Be perfect, as your father in heaven is perfect." He gives us the Spirit within us, he renews our mind, he gives us access to resurrection power to enable us to show the love of Christ to the world -- but we instead, unintentionally or intentionally, step out in our own power and fail. The offering in Leviticus 4:1-35 describes God's provision for dealing with one type of sin. So we've come to the topic of sin. But note that God does not start with sin. The first three offerings do not deal with sin. God starts by establishing a relationship with us -- and then he deals with the sin in our life. God's love and acceptance come first -- then his loving rebuke.

We get this backward often, usually when dealing with someone who struggles with a different sin than our own. We judge before we love. We communicate condemnation rather than care and concern. We hate the sin, but instead of loving the sinner we despise him. We want sinners to get their act cleaned up, to make themselves presentable, and then we will be willing to meet with them. But this never works, for no non-Christian is able to live a life worthy of the calling of the Lord, and we should not expect them to do so! Furthermore, we can't speak effectively against someone's sin unless they know of our love. God loves the world -- Do you and I love the world? So in Leviticus, God starts not by talking about sin but by talking about love, joy, and peace. This is what the world so much desires, and what people who have everything the world has to offer still lack. God never ignores sin -- here it is in Leviticus 4:1-35 -- but God's method is to establish the love relationship first, and then deal with sin. So now that we've talked about love, joy, and peace, we need to turn our attention to sin. We'll spend the rest of our time together looking first at some

of the distinctives of this sin offering, and then look at the implications for our attitude towards sin.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 4:1-35. We'll read Leviticus 4:1-12 :

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and commits any of them, 3 if the anointed priest sins so as to bring guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD a bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. 4 And he shall bring the bull to the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, and he shall lay his hand on the head of the bull, and slay the bull before the LORD. 5 Then the anointed priest is to take some of the blood of the bull and bring it to the tent of meeting, 6 and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. 7 The priest shall also put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense which is before the LORD in the tent of meeting; and all the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering which is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 8 And he shall remove from it all the fat of the bull of the sin offering: the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat which is on the entrails, 9 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys 10 (just as it is removed from the ox of the sacrifice of peace offerings), and the priest is to offer them up in smoke on the altar of burnt offering. 11 But the hide of the bull and all its flesh with its head and its legs and its entrails and its refuse, 12 that is, all the rest of the bull, he is to bring out to a clean place outside the camp where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned.' This is the way the offering is to be administered if the high priest sins. The chapter continues with a description of the offering in the cases of the congregation as a whole, a leader of the people, or one of the common people. We won't read all those here, but will point out some of the differences between them. So let us turn our attention to the ways that the sin offering differs from the first three offerings. We'll highlight five differences.

**DISTINCTIVES OF THE SIN OFFERING** The Sin Offering is Required The first three offerings are all voluntary offerings; the priests offered them regularly for the entire people, but individuals brought these offerings whenever they so desired. Consider the way each of the first three chapters begins:

Leviticus 1:1-17 : If the offering is a burnt offering, he is to . . .

Leviticus 2:1-16 : When someone brings a grain offering to the Lord, his offering is to be . . .

Leviticus 3:1-17 : If someone's offering is a fellowship offering . . .

But Leviticus 4:1-35 : When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden . . . he must bring to the Lord . . .

Similar phrases occur four times in this chapter, in Leviticus 4:3, Leviticus 4:14, Leviticus 4:23 and Leviticus 4:28. This is not a freewill offering. As soon as an Israelite became aware of his sin, he was to bring this offering. The relationship with God is violated by the sin, and must be restored. The Sacrifice is Available to All Individuals As in the case of the burnt offering, God makes provision for different socioeconomic groups. Since everyone who sins must bring an offering, God

varies the requirement depending upon the income of the person who sinned. As shown in the last few verses of chapter 4 and the first half of chapter 5, common people could offer a female goat, or, if this was too expensive, two doves or pigeons, or, if the birds were too expensive, two quarts of flour. Note that the type of offering varied with the person who sinned, not with the sin. God didn't say that there were some sins that required a goat and other sins that required only flour. No. God's gracious provision here ensures that every person who sinned had access to Him, was able to act in such a way that the relationship would be restored. But each person also had to perform this rite, showing that sin has consequences.

**God Determines the Sex of the Sacrificial Animal** As we pointed out in the introductory sermon on Leviticus, in the Old Testament, the male is the symbol of initiative, and the female the symbol of responsiveness, perhaps in part because of the picture provided by the different sexual organs. So the priest, the congregation as a whole, or the leader -- those who are initiators, leaders -- must present a male animal; the common people, the followers, present females. **The Blood Ritual** The most distinctive aspect of the sin offering is the blood ritual that accompanies the sacrifice. The sacrifice begins in exactly the same way as the burnt offering and the peace offering. The offerer brings the animal to the entrance of the tent of meeting and lays his hands on the animal, leaning on it to identify it with himself, to put his sins on the animal. Then, the offerer himself kills the animal. Note that the priest does not kill the animal, but the offerer -- showing that the offerer's sins are responsible for the death of the animal. As with the peace offering, the fat of the animal is removed and burned before the Lord. But the main distinction of this offering is what the priest does with the blood. As in the grain and peace offering, most of the blood is poured out at the base of the altar. Some of the blood, however, is sprinkled seven times on the incense altar or the altar of burnt offering (depending upon what type of person committed the sin). And then blood is smeared on the four horns of the altar. To us this seems very strange and gory. We'll come back to the meaning later, but note now this common refrain, which appears four times in Leviticus 4:1-35 : In this way the priest will make atonement for them and they will be forgiven. The blood ritual is somehow tied to the atonement, the forgiveness of the sin. **The Use of the Animal's Body** At this point in the ritual, the blood and fat are gone. What is done with the rest?

If the High Priest or the congregation as a whole committed the sin, the remaining parts of the animal's body are burned in their entirety outside the camp, at a place which is ceremonially clean. This is the same place which the priests take the ashes left over from the burnt offering (Leviticus 6:11). The instructions given beginning in Leviticus 6:25 cover the other cases:

25 "Say to Aaron and his sons: 'These are the regulations for the sin offering: The sin offering is to be slaughtered before the LORD in the place the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy. 26 The priest who offers it shall eat it; it is to be eaten in a holy place, in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. 27 Whatever touches any of the flesh will become holy, and if any of the blood is spattered on a garment, you must wash it in a holy place. 28 The clay pot the meat is cooked in must be broken; but if it is cooked in a bronze pot, the pot is to be scoured and rinsed with water. 29 Any male in a priest's family may eat it; it is most holy. 30 But any sin offering whose blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place must not be eaten; it must be burned. So the priest and males in his family eat the boiled meat. Note that the body is not unclean; it is no longer identified as sin. Instead, God declares, "It is most holy." Anyone who touches the meat will become holy, and a garment that gets blood on it must be washed in holy

place, not just anywhere.

You see why? This meat from the sin offering is a picture of the body of Jesus, the sacrifice that draws us near to God. This is most holy. Even a clay pot which has been used to cook this food must never be used again -- not because it is unclean, but because it is holy, it has served the most exalted of purposes and can never be used for a common purpose again.

These are the primary distinctives of the sin offering. Let's now turn our attention to what the offering tells us about sin itself. I'll highlight four points:

#### (1) Every Sin is Serious

God has called you His, you have responded to that love, and have depended upon God's love and strength to give you peace in the middle of trials. But even one sin breaks down that relationship, even when that sin is unintentional.

Several weeks ago I was biking home from the office, coming down the hill past the Savings Bank toward the intersection of Main St and Water St. Some of you know that many people turning right on Main St at that intersection don't stop at the stop sign (Do you?). Knowing that, I was braking, keeping an eye on cars that might be turning left in front of me or turning right onto Main St without stopping. Sure enough, a car went right through the stop sign, going at least 15 mph. Had I not already been braking, I would have been hit -- and, since I was traveling maybe 25mph, possibly killed. Even though I was braking, I had to grip hard, skid, and almost fall. As it turned out, the stop light 200 yards away turned red, so I caught up with the car just a few seconds later. The driver called out to me through the open window, "I didn't see you!" She was saying, "I wasn't intentionally trying to kill you!" To tell the truth, that wasn't much comfort. Whether she meant to or not, had I not been biking defensively, she would have seriously injured me. The moral of that story is not that you should stop at that stop sign (though I hope you will, at least when I'm biking home!). The moral is that unintentional sin is still sin. Unintentional sin still has serious consequences. So we pray with the Psalmist,

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me (Psalms 139:23-24) Every sin is important, every sin breaks down our relationship with God. We need to deal with every sin.

(2) Sin Requires a Death to Restore the Relationship with God This point emphasizes the first. Sin is not something trivial. We cannot simply say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to do that," and go on our merry way. The Israelite who sinned unintentionally was required to present a sin offering to the Lord, he was required to kill an animal. And he himself must draw the knife across the animal's throat, causing the animal's death.

Just so with us: Even our smallest sin would separate us for all eternity from a holy and righteous God -- had Jesus himself not paid the penalty. Just as the Israelite bringing his sin offering kills the animal, we kill Jesus with each sin we commit; we drive nails through his hands, we thrust the spear into his side with each sin we commit. God provides for the restoration of the relationship after we sin, but that restoration requires the death of a perfect substitute, that restoration comes at an incredibly high price paid by God himself. God forbid that we take that for granted; God forbid that we think sin is unimportant because our sins are already forgiven.

(3) Every Confessed Sin is Forgiven. When we don't confess, our relationship with God is undermined. We lose the peace, we lose the sense of our acceptance before God. David relates this in Psalms 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. But David goes on to say what happens when he confessed:

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. . . . Rejoice in the Lord!

God views our sins seriously; when we don't confess, he will lean on us, he will sap our strength. But God has provided the only way out! He has given the perfect sacrifice in Jesus himself, so that he can be both just and the one who justifies us.

Paul puts it this way:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Now, recall that Paul was writing in Greek, and that he generally quotes the Old Testament from its Greek translation, the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, the sin offering is simply referred to as "sin" twice in chapter 4 of Leviticus. So we could understand Paul's statement here to mean that God made Jesus who had no sin to be a sin offering for us -- so that we might be in him, and so that we might become God's righteousness. We who are sinners become God's righteousness! The forgiveness is complete when that takes place.

How does God do this? By the shed blood of Jesus, our last point:

#### (4) The Blood of Jesus Cleanses Us From All Sin

Blood -- we sing songs about the blood, we hear talk of the cleansing nature of the blood, but for 20th century Americans this is a strange and difficult concept. Indeed, a church choir director once told me, "I wish we'd get rid of all those gory hymns that talk about the blood of Jesus!" For most of us, blood is a nuisance. Our main contact with blood is when someone has an accident of some type, and starts to bleed. Assuming that the person's life is not in danger, the main problem is cleaning up the mess. Even a little blood is hard to clean; if not treated properly it can destroy our nice clothes. So blood to us is something that makes a mess. But the picture in Leviticus is the opposite: Blood is the best cleaning agent in existence! Blood is necessary to cleanse us from the defilement of sin. So the priest sprinkles the altar seven times with the blood -- seven being the number of completeness, of perfection, indicating that the cleansing is perfect. Then the blood is smeared on the highest points of the altar, on the horns of the altar. I believe God ordained this act in part so that the blood was clearly visible to all concerned. The blood covered the horns of the altar. Atonement had been made. Forgiveness was complete. If I presented the offering, I only needed to look up, and there was the cleansing blood, indicating that God accepts me, that God has restored the relationship. The author of the book of Hebrews brings this out clearly:

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and

the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:11-14) . . . 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins . . . 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Hebrews 10:4; Hebrews 10:14) As remarkable as this sin offering is, that animal blood sprinkled on the altar and smeared on the horns of the altar could never take away sins. But the sin offering is a startlingly clear picture of what Jesus accomplished through shedding his blood. Like the Israelite looking at the bloody altar and knowing he is cleansed, we can look to Jesus' blood, look at his great sacrifice, and know that we are perfected for all time; we can know that we are cleansed from all guilt; we can know that we need not worry about making ourselves acceptable to God; we can know that we are cleansed for the purpose of serving the living God.

We need to acknowledge that forgiveness. Satan will try to dredge up old sins, telling us, "Look what you did! You can't be forgiven for that!" And we then confess the sin again and again to God, and continually feel terrible. But you see why that is wrong? Confessing the same sin again and again is saying that the blood of Jesus is not sufficient to cover that sin! If you have truly confessed, if you have truly trusted in the blood of Jesus, you can know that God forgives you.

#### Conclusion

Let's get back to your friend who asked about coming back to the Lord. Of the two answers I suggested you might have given, the first was flippant: "Oh, don't worry about that." This answer does not accurately reflect the gravity of sin, the seriousness of sin. Every sin leads to Christ's death! Every sin thrusts a spear in his side! We can't take sin lightly.

Yet the second answer was equally wrong. This second answer misinterprets Hebrews 6:1-20, saying that there is no hope for the person who falls away. (Hebrews 6:1-20, by the way, is challenging us to ensure that we really give evidence of salvation; we must not simply assume that we are Christians because we have gone through a ritual.)

There is a tension here between two truths: The enormity of sin, and the enormity of God's grace. We must never belittle either of those truths. Sin is serious. Every sin. But the blood of Jesus is sufficient to cover all our sins, so that He might present us to himself a glorious church, holy and blameless, without spot or wrinkle or blemish of any kind. So where are you? If you trying to get as close to the line as possible without sinning, than you have reason to question the nature of your relationship to the Lord. Obedience and striving after perfection are signs of sonship. Make your calling and election sure by growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if you find yourself caught up in sin, if you once walked with the Lord but have not been doing so, you can know that complete forgiveness is available. Turn to the Lord. Turn your back on your sin. Confess your weakness and your sinful ways. As John writes,

8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

He is just to forgive us our sins! How? Justice requires punishment! But Jesus accepted the punishment through the shedding of his blood. Because he paid the penalty, God can be just in

forgiving every confessed sin. Know that. Depend upon it.

Before we close, I want to let you know that the story of the friend asking a question is not imaginary. We have this friend worshiping with us this morning. And she rededicated her life to the Lord this week. She now understands that sin is serious, that sin requires death. But she also knows that confessed sin is always forgiven, as we can be completely cleansed by the shed blood of Jesus.

You too can know these truths, can know this forgiveness. Won't you ask for it?

Let us pray: Our most precious Savior, we praise you for choosing to shed your blood on the cross for sinners such as us. We know that we do not deserve your mercy, but you have offered us love, joy, and peace; you have offered us forgiveness from all our sins, whatever they may be. May we take to heart the gravity of sin, yet may we also understand the cleansing power of your blood. May we both live out and communicate these truths to the world around us.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 6/28/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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## 01.06. The Need for Reconciliation (Lev\_5:1-19; Lev\_6:1-30)

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The Need for Reconciliation A sermon on Leviticus 5:14-19; Leviticus 6:1-7 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, July 12, 1998

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 5:1-19. We come this morning to the fifth and last of the offerings prescribed by God, these provisions for meeting man's basic needs. Recall that on Mt Sinai the Israelites had promised to abide by the commands they had heard God pronounce -- yet within a matter of hours they grossly violated those very commands. They were unable to live up to the law. But God in his grace provides these offerings, painting a picture of all that Jesus Christ would accomplish for us on the cross. We have already considered:

The burnt offering, in which God pictures his loving acceptance of us, as he calls us to be a people for his own possession. This meets our need for love.

The grain offering, in which we respond to God's acceptance by declaring that we belong fully to Him.

The peace offering, picturing the peace that is ours in the midst of a broken, sin-plagued world.

The sin offering, showing God's forgiveness for us through the shed blood of Jesus.

Today we will examine the trespass or guilt offering. This offering is very similar to the sin offering in its details. Indeed, in Leviticus 7:7 God says, The trespass offering is like the sin offering, there is one law for them. And in Leviticus 5:6 the words for "guilt offering" and "sin offering" seem to be used interchangeably (this comes through most clearly in the KJV or NASB; the latter reads: 'He shall also bring his guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering.') So instead of following our pattern of looking at the details of this offering, this morning we will expand on the lessons about sin that we gleaned two weeks ago when studying the sin offering. You recall that we noted four points about sin:

Every sin is serious;

Every sin requires a death, as acted out when the offerer slits the throat of this perfect animal, signifying that each sin drives another nail into the hand of Jesus;

Every confessed sin is forgiven;

The blood of Jesus makes forgiveness possible, cleansing us completely from all sin;

The trespass offering elaborates on the need for confession, and then highlights the need for restitution when that is possible. And, as we will see, this is particularly important when our sins have an impact on other people; God requires not only that we confess the sin to him, he not only wants us to restore the broken relationship with Him, but he also requires that we confess to and recompense the person we have hurt.

Let's now read beginning in Leviticus 5:14 :

14 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

15 If a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the LORD'S holy things, then he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD: a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation in silver by shekels, in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering.

16 And he shall make restitution for that which he has sinned against the holy thing, and shall add to it a fifth part of it, and give it to the priest. The priest shall then make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him. This category of sin includes unintentional violations of God's requirements, such as not paying the tithe, or not calculating the firstfruits offering correctly. You can understand how calculating a tithe in an agricultural crop might be difficult; a farmer who lacks literacy and numeracy might unwittingly err in setting aside God's portion. When an Israelite made such an error, his obligation did not disappear. Indeed, his obligation increases by 20%. The Israelite is not allowed to delay payment, and then simply say, "Oh, I missed out on that. Here is what I owe." No. He must add 20% to what was due, plus sacrifice a perfect ram. An unintentional sin is still a sin. Even a delay in fulfilling an obligation requires a death to atone for the sin. God's standard is perfection, in timeliness as well as in action.

Let us continue reading in Leviticus 5:17 :

17 Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty, and shall bear his punishment. 18 He is then to bring to the priest a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a trespass offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he sinned unintentionally and did not know it, and it shall be forgiven him. 19 It is a trespass offering; he was certainly guilty before the LORD."

We might summarize these three verses by using the phrase, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse!" Here a person has violated God's commands unwittingly, because he didn't properly understand the law. But he can't use ignorance as an excuse! He is responsible for knowing and following God's commands. The case is the same with us. If I'm driving 45 mph in a 25-mph zone, and a policeman stops me, it won't do me much good to say, "But I didn't see the speed limit sign!" As a driver, I'm responsible for obeying the law, I'm responsible for keeping my eyes open and seeing traffic signs. Just so, we have this word; we are responsible for studying it, for knowing it.

God in his grace makes provision for the restoration of our relationship to him after sins of ignorance -- but once again, punishment must be meted out. A death must occur; even sins done in ignorance require the death of a perfect substitute. Every sin done in ignorance drives another nail into the hands of Jesus. And once again, a 20% penalty is added to the payment, to show that the person is not using this as a means to delay his financial obligations, but is truly repentant.

Continue reading now in Leviticus 6:1-30 :

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

2 "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has cheated his

companion, 3 or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do; 4 then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him, or the lost thing which he found, 5 or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full, and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his trespass offering. 6 Then he shall bring to the priest his trespass offering to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering, 7 and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD; and he shall be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt."

How do these sins differ from the ones we have considered previously? Two points to notice:

These are sins against man. I rob someone. I cheat another person out of money. I find something that I know belongs to another, and don't return it. In all of these cases, I have caused harm to another person. Now, note the beginning of Leviticus 6:2 : "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD." Although all these sins hurt another person, all of these sins also are against God -- we violate our relationship with God by committing these sins. But the distinctive aspect of these sins is that another person is involved also.

These sins are intentional. If I'm cheating another person out of money, I'm not doing that unintentionally. And when someone else's stereo is found in your room, it's pretty hard to say, "Oh, I didn't mean to steal it. It just sort of stuck to my fingers when I walked through your house." These are intentional sins that harm another person.

To heal the relationship with the other person as well as God, the sinner must pay back what he stole plus 20%. He doesn't just go and say, "Oh, I'm sorry I robbed you." He doesn't say, "If I hurt you, forgive me." No. He says, "I sinned against God and against you. I publicly confess that I was terribly in the wrong. Here is what is yours, and here Isaiah 20:1-6 more. Will you forgive me?" There must be a true confession, a true admitting that he is in the wrong.

Now consider carefully the order of events. When is restitution paid? Consider again Leviticus 6:5-6 :

He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his trespass offering. 6 THEN he shall bring to the priest his trespass offering to the LORD

Restitution is paid to the victim first. Only after that is accomplished can the sinner right the relationship with God.

These are very profound thoughts, and I want to spend the rest of our time together this morning elaborating on them. I'm going to make three points:

(1) Every sin, at heart, is a sin against God.

Remember how Jesus summarized the Old Testament scriptures? He said the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength. And the second greatest commandment is like it: You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself.

You see what he is saying? It is not that resolving problems in human relationships is unimportant; Jesus, after all, says that the second most important commandment is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. By including this trespass offering among the five, God is saying that resolving problems in human relationships is of extreme importance. But it is not the most important. The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.

After stating this, however, Jesus says: "The second command is like it." How is loving God like loving your neighbor? Loving your neighbor is a consequence of loving God. That is what God pictures in the order of these offerings. The relationship with God begins by his choosing you for his own precious possession, as portrayed in the burnt offering. Our response to that choice, our giving ourselves to God wholly and completely, is portrayed in the grain offering. Peace in the midst of the trials and tribulations of life is portrayed in the third offering. And the atonement for our sins against God is portrayed in the sin offering. Jesus displayed and fulfilled all of these four offerings on the cross. But we also sin against each other. We hurt each other through our anger, through our negligence, through our greed. And the message of the trespass offering is that Jesus died for that too! Jesus' death not only heals our relationship with God, it also heals our relationships with men. But the relationship with God is logically prior to the relationship with men. The world gets this backward. Secular counselors (and, unfortunately, some Christian counselors) are always trying to heal relationships among people by focussing on the people themselves. They try to teach communication skills, sensitivity skills, they try to help people to look back in their past and understand why they react in certain ways. All that may work to smooth out some of the rough parts of our character, but it won't change the heart. Only God can change the heart -- and that is what Jesus died for. So this is our second point:

(2) A right relationship with God enables us to heal broken human relationships.

You see, if you have love, joy, and peace in your relationship to God, if you are forgiven for all of your sins, if you know the depth of those sins, then that must overflow into your interactions with others. You cannot know deep down that you deserve none of what God has done for you, you cannot truly know God's love for you, you cannot have given yourself completely back to God, you cannot truly have peace in all circumstances, without also having a forgiving heart, without also having a deep compassion for others caught in slavery to sin.

Think about what makes you angry: Someone breaks a promise. They take advantage of you. They hurt you. So you become angry and want to lash back. Is God's love insufficient for you? Is God's joy incomplete? Does God's peace really surpass all human understanding? Is God in control?

You see, any anger or bitterness with another person in the end is anger and bitterness with a sovereign God. If you are angry and bitter with someone else, you are saying, in effect, two things:

(a) The all-powerful God is not strong enough or does not love me enough to keep this from happening;

Or, (b) The provisions that God has made for me are insufficient to meet my needs. When we really know God, when we truly understand who we are before God, when we understand that we deserve absolutely nothing that God has given us, then we get into a position where we CANNOT

become angry and bitter. We see that we have yielded our rights, so those rights cannot be violated. And therefore confessing to others is easy, because we are not embarrassed, we are not trying to make ourselves look good.

George Muller put it this way: "There was a day when I died, utterly died to George Muller and his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of even my brethren and friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God." So every sin is a sin against God, and a right relationship with God enables us to heal broken human relationships. But if these statements are true, why does God tell us to pay restitution prior to offering the sacrifice? Indeed, Jesus elaborates on this in Matthew 5:23-24 :

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

Although the relationship with God is logically prior to any healing of human relationships, it is also true that the healing of human relationships -- forgiveness from the heart and an attempt at reconciliation -- is a necessary implication of a right relationship with God. To approach the altar with bitterness, anger, and broken relationships is failing to acknowledge our own lack of merit -- and we can never approach God on our own merit. So our third point is:

(3) A right relationship with God not only enables us to heal broken human relationships; it also requires us to heal these relationships. When we see ourselves for what we truly are, when we see that we are really nothing, we are sinners, we are unclean, then we can yield whatever rights we have, we can let down our guard, and open ourselves fully in confession to those we have wronged.

Similarly, we are required to forgive, even before the person who wronged us asks for forgiveness. Once again, God is our source of peace, God is the source of our self-esteem, God is the source of our love. He himself meets all our needs. So when someone wrongs us, we can overlook the personal offense, forgive the person from the heart, and pray that God would work in this person's life.

Back in the 70's, Ken Medema wrote a song containing these words: "If this is not a place where tears are understood, where can I go to cry?" The body of Christ needs to be a place where tears are understood. The body of Christ needs to be a place where we are free to fail, where we can go to someone, confess our sins, and be forgiven from the heart.

## CONCLUSIONS

Let me try to tie all these thoughts together now. This offering as presented in Leviticus 6:1-30 concerns the healing of human relationships. And it is through the breaking down of human relationships that God gets our attention, isn't it. We all want close human relationships. We want to love and be loved; we want friends who care for us, colleagues who respect us, a family that love us. And we may invest ourselves in these relationships, we may work hard at making these relationships work -- only to feel betrayed. A husband or wife leaves us. A parent betrays our trust. Or our parents divorce. We don't get promoted and wonder why, we wonder who stabbed us in the

back. A boyfriend or girlfriend decides we're no longer exciting, we're no longer cool, and breaks up with us. The message of this offering is, God cares. God cares about our human relationships. God is in the process of restoring to perfection not only the relationship between man and God but also the relationships between man and man.

Indeed, the message of the Bible is that you can't have one without the other. We try to work on the relationships between man and man without reference to God. We see war, oppression, and exploitation; we see murder, violence, and crime; we see divorce, adultery, and child abuse; we see all this evidence of a breakdown in human relationships and we want to do something about it. But God tells us here that we must first deal with Him, we must first find true love, joy, peace, and forgiveness in Him -- and then we will be in a position to bring love, joy, peace, and forgiveness into our human relationships. For then we can hold all these relationships lightly. Here is a profound truth, a paradoxical truth: Our human relationships will be at their best when we hold them lightly; our human relationships are at their best when we realize that they are all secondary to our relationship with God. So I love my wife and children dearly -- but they are not the source of my joy. I serve my employer faithfully -- but my work is not the source of my self-esteem. I care for my friends deeply -- but they do not fill my need for love. Love, joy, self-esteem -- in the Christian, all of these come not through human relationships, but from God, from what God tells us about His love for us, from the position to which He exalts us by the shed blood of His son, Jesus. And when this is true then we are free! We are free to love our family and friends, and to serve our employer, regardless of their response to us! You see, if I depend on my kids for love, what happens when they rebel? What happens when they don't respond to my love? Then I'm hurt, I'm angered, I'm unfulfilled in that relationship -- and I want to back out of it. I no longer want to give myself to that relationship because it is no longer meeting my needs. But if my need for love is fulfilled in my relationship with God, then I am free to love my kids regardless of their response. My love can be unconditional, because I do not need their love.

Furthermore, when I don't need their love, I'm much more likely to receive it! A child or spouse who knows that my love is unconditional is much more likely to love me in return than the child who sees that I desperately need his or her love. A clinging, desperate love tends eventually to drive the loved one away. When we are primarily concerned with meeting our needs in relationships, we become slaves to those needs. Self sets itself up as our master. But a right relationship with God, a relationship in which all our needs are met in Him, sets us free. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it: The knowledge of God humbles us to the dust, and in that position you do not think about your rights and your dignity. You have no need any longer to protect yourselves, because you feel you are unworthy of everything. . . . We begin to see [that others are] exactly as we are ourselves, and we are both in a terrible predicament. And we can do nothing. But both of us together must run to Christ and avail ourselves of His wonderful grace. . . . It is when we are really loving our neighbor as ourselves because we have been delivered from the thralldom of self, that we begin to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God. So where are you in your human relationships? Are you here at the altar this morning with unconfessed sin against a neighbor, a family member, an employer, an employee? Are you caught in a broken relationship with another person who is worshipping with us this morning? God doesn't want your praise songs when you are in that state. God doesn't want your good deeds. God doesn't want your worship. Leave your gift at the altar. The most effective way you can praise God is to go and confess that sin.

Immediately. So what are you going to do? You know, you can hear me preach this sermon today, and feel conviction in your heart, and say, "Yes, this is true. I need to confess. I need to make restitution," -- and walk away and do nothing. I tell you right now, that the minute you begin to drive away from church, Satan will begin to wheedle you, "Think of your reputation! This really isn't so important -- You've already confessed it privately to God in church, you need do no more." Or he might be a bit more subtle, saying, "Yes, that's a good idea -- but now is not the time. You can confess tomorrow." And you know what? Some of you are going to give in to that temptation. You'll put off confession till tomorrow, then the next day -- and then the conviction will pass, and you will never do it. But by the grace and authority God has given me to preach His word, I give you this charge: Resist the devil! And I give you this promise: He will flee from you! Free yourself from the thralldom of self! Throw yourself on the mercy of your loving heavenly Father! Confess your sins to those you have hurt! Do it today! Do it now! I don't care if you do it right now while I'm still speaking, if you think you had better not wait even a minute, do it now! Know that you are completely unworthy of even the smallest kindness from God, know that he loves you more than you can ever imagine, know that He has met all your needs for love, for joy, for peace, for forgiveness -- know that the glorious freedom of a clear conscience before God awaits you. There is no place for anger and bitterness and lust in his children. By God's power, heal those relationships. Now.

We're all going to pray silently. If you want to use this time to confess to others here this morning, please do so even while the rest of us pray.

Oh, our dearest Lord and Father, you know the depths of sin in our hearts. You know better than we ourselves how sin has permeated the deepest recesses of our lives, so that even our best deeds are done with mixed motives. You know how we have sinned against even those we love most. Lord, through the trespass offering you impress upon us the need for us to reconcile with each other. May we commit before you so to do. Lord I pray for your strength to infuse each one of us so that we might resist Satan's attempts to derail this commitment. And when we sin again tomorrow, and Tuesday, and subsequent days, may we seek reconciliation with each other right away. Thank you, O Father, that in you we can find everything our hearts desire.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 7/12/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him. This sermon also draws heavily on Martyn Lloyd-Jones superb book, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## 01.07. The Priesthood of All Believers (Lev\_8:1-3)

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The Priesthood of All Believers A sermon by Coty Pinckney on Leviticus 8:1-3, preached at Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, on 9/6/98 Is there anyone here this morning who would like to become a priest? Do we have any volunteers for the priesthood? Or is there anyone here this morning who needs a priest? When most of us hear the word "priest" we think of Roman Catholic clergy; we think of someone wearing a particular type of clothing, someone who will offer absolution from sins after we attend confession. And to say we need a priest tends to imply that we are about to die. But these conceptions are not biblical. Typical Roman Catholic usage has distorted our conception of the word "priest," just as it has distorted our conception of the word "saint." According to the Bible, saints are not special, super-Christians: every believer covered by the shed blood of Jesus is a saint. As the book of Ephesians says, every believer is chosen by God to be holy and blameless in his sight. The Greek words for "holy" and "saint" have the same root. All Christians are declared holy by God; all Christians are saints.

Similarly, priests are not special Christians called to full time ministry, priests are not a subset of Christians who have authority to forgive sins. Many Protestants tend to think of the word "priest" as another word for "pastor." Well, our pastor, Doug, is a priest -- but I am a priest, and Bryce is a priest. And the priesthood isn't limited to elders. Jim Conway is a priest, Jason Richard is a priest. And it's not limited to men! Every believer, every person who receives Jesus as Lord and Savior, is a priest before God.

Furthermore, during the course of the morning I will suggest that every one of us here this morning needs a priest! Not because we're about to die, not necessarily because we've engaged in some sin that requires confession to a human being, but because we live in a sinful, fallen world. God calls us to be priests so that we might shed the light of Jesus on every human problem, so that we might proclaim the truths of God's word to everyone who struggles with the effects of sin. So all believers are saints; all believers are priests; all believers need priests. This morning, we're returning to the book of Leviticus, this beautiful Old Testament picture of New Testament truth. For the next few sermons in this series, we will examine the role of the priests.

Recall our reasons for studying Leviticus. This book provides us with pictures, with illustrations of New Covenant truth. Recall also that the first part of the book records God's provisions for dealing with man's weaknesses, and the last part of the book details God's requirements. Thus far, we have covered Leviticus 1:1-17, Leviticus 2:1-16, Leviticus 3:1-17, Leviticus 4:1-35, Leviticus 5:1-19, Leviticus 6:1-30, Leviticus 7:1-38, which describe the five offerings that God instituted: the burnt offering, the present or grain offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. We have seen how those offerings picture five fundamental human needs -- the need for love, for joy, for peace, for confession, and for reconciliation -- and how Jesus' death on the cross meets those needs. Each of the offerings brings out a different aspect of what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

Like the offerings, the picture of the priest found in Leviticus displays New Testament truth -- in a detailed form. Once again, Leviticus brings out a human need -- the need for a priest, the need for another human being to help us to see ourselves, and to apply biblical truth to our lives. The New Testament presumes our familiarity with the priesthood -- but many of us know little about it. So in this study we will learn about ourselves as priests, and, furthermore, learn about Jesus' role in our lives as high priest. In this series of messages, we will consider Leviticus 8:1-36 & Leviticus 9:1-24, where Aaron and his sons are ordained as priests, then offer their initial offerings to the Lord: Leviticus 10:1-20, when two of Aaron's son act presumptuously before God and are immediately killed; and Leviticus 21:1-24 and Leviticus 22:1-33, which lay down requirements for those of Aaron's descendants who would serve as priests. I commend all of these passages to you for your personal study.

### God's Plan for a Kingdom of Priests

Before we turn to Leviticus, I want to introduce this series by examining God's plan for a kingdom of priests. The idea that the office of priest is shared among a large number of believers did not begin with the New Testament. From the time that the Israelites stood before God at Mt Sinai, this was God's plan.

We see this first of all in Exodus 19:3-6 : 3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."

God says, "If you obey my voice and keep My covenant, then you will be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." Did they obey his voice and keep God's covenant? No -- as we've noted before, God knew they could not keep this covenant; he had already planned to send His son to deal with man's sin. He instituted the entire sacrificial system because of man's weakness, foreshadowing what Jesus would accomplish on the cross -- meeting our need for acceptance, our need to respond, our need for peace, our need for forgiveness, and our need for reconciliation. The Israelites, like the rest of us, were not able to live up to God's holy standard -- but God instituted the law as our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, to show us our need for a savior. So God's plan was to establish a kingdom of priests. But the nation of Israel did not and could not fulfill that plan. So God said through the prophet Jeremiah 31:31-33 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, "declares the LORD. 33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. In this new covenant, by writing the law on the hearts of his people, God would fulfill the plan laid out in Exodus 19:1-25, the plan to establish a kingdom of priests. Peter declares the fulfillment of this plan in 1 Peter 2:1-25, beginning in 1 Peter 2:4 (by the way, this passage also shows that Peter understood that he himself was NOT the rock

on which the church would be built):

4 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--  
5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering  
spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a  
stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put  
to shame." 7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The  
stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," 8 and, "A stone that causes men to  
stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message--  
which is also what they were destined for. 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a  
holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you  
out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the  
people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:5 that we are being built up as a "spiritual house for a holy priesthood,"  
and then in 1 Peter 2:9 he quotes directly the Greek translation of Exodus 19:6 : We are (right  
now! this is not future tense, but present!) We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,  
a people for God's own possession. God's plan expressed at Mt Sinai and prophesied through  
Jeremiah has been fulfilled: Now God has a kingdom of priests.

John echoes this theme in Revelation 1:1-20 and Revelation 5:1-14. Revelation 1:4-6 constitute  
John's greeting to the recipients of this letter, the seven churches in Asia. He concludes that  
greeting by saying, "To him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood -- and He has  
made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father."

Note he did not say: "He has made SOME of us." or "He has selected from among us certain ones  
to be priests to God." All of us are priests. So God from the beginning intended to create a  
kingdom of priests, a holy nation for his own possession. The Israelites thought that they could  
become that nation by obedience to the law, but they never did and never could. The purpose of  
the law was to show us our inability to be holy and righteous before God, to show us that we can  
only become holy and blameless by throwing ourselves on the mercy of God -- as David did in  
Psalms 51:1-19. We, like David, need for God to create in us a clean heart, we need God to wash  
us and make us clean, we need God to put His Spirit in us and to write his law in our hearts. And  
when God sanctifies us, when God saves us by the blood of Jesus, we become a kingdom of  
priests, dedicated to His service.

So, if you are saved by the blood of Jesus, you are a saint and you are a priest. So we are priests:  
who now is the high priest? The book of Hebrews makes this very clear: Jesus himself is our  
"merciful and faithful high priest (Hebrews 2:17)." He is "our great high priest who has passed  
through the heavens (Hebrews 4:14). "He is able to save completely those who come to God  
through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:25)"

Therefore, we need no superpriests or human high priests today; Jesus accomplished everything  
necessary for our forgiveness and salvation. Indeed, the primary purpose of the Jewish high priest  
was to foreshadow Jesus himself. So all believers are priests, with Jesus as our high priest. We  
will use these insights to help us interpret these five chapters on the priesthood in Leviticus.  
Statements about the priests in general are symbolically true of all Christians; statements about

the high priest alone are symbolically true of Jesus.

### Priests Are Not Lone Rangers

There is one more item to clear up, however, before we turn to Leviticus. I have been advocating here the reformation doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers." But this doctrine has been misunderstood in some American Protestant circles. I want to clear up that misconception before we proceed with the positive teaching on the priesthood from Leviticus.

We Americans grow up with the myth of the rugged individualist, the self-made man, and the Lone Ranger. We hold in high esteem the man who stands on his own against prevailing opinion. This mindset at times has affected our understanding of this most important doctrine. The misconception of the doctrine goes like this: "I'm a priest. I have the Holy Spirit and I have direct access to the Father. Therefore, my interpretation of the Bible is as valid as yours. I don't need to listen to what you or anyone else says. My religion is between me and God."

Now, this misconception begins with true statements. All Christians are priests; all Christians have access directly to God. But our being priests does not imply that I am out from under any human authority. The very New Testament book that focuses on the priesthood says:

Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17)

Similarly, the Priesthood of All Believers does not imply, "My interpretation of the Bible is ok, your interpretation of the Bible is ok." As we have preached previously <idealchurch.htm>, God provides the gifts of teachers in the church so that we will not be blown around by every wind of doctrine, but will in all ways grow up into Christ (Ephesians 4:1-32). Elsewhere, Paul gives explicit directions to elders to "exhort others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:9). As we will see, to use the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as a license to go out and be a lone ranger, interpreting the Bible on one's own, living your version of the Christian life on your own, is far, far away from the biblical model of priest. God makes you into a priest for a purpose, and that purpose is to serve. Leviticus itself will bring this out, but for now note that 1 Peter 2:5; 1 Peter 2:9 which we just read provide us with the purpose of our priesthood: to offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," and to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." The Consecration of Priests Let's turn now, at long last, to Leviticus 8:1-36, and see how God brings out these truths.

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering, and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread; 3 and assemble all the congregation at the doorway of the tent of meeting."

Let's make seven, brief observations about what is going on here:

First, note that this is all done at the Lord's command. God is speaking through Moses, God is in control of this entire process. God chooses who will be priests, and he ordains the way their consecration shall proceed. The selection and consecration of the priests is God's work, through the agency of Moses, from beginning to end.

Second, note that God picks a particular man and his sons to serve as priests. No one else was allowed to assume that role. God didn't have Moses say, "OK, we need a priesthood. Any volunteers out there?" God didn't instruct Moses to put an ad in the paper, then have all applicants fill out forms, answer questions, and perform a trial sacrifice for Moses to evaluate. God didn't have Moses attempt to pick those who would be best for the job. No. God simply chose Aaron and his sons.

Why did God choose them? Because they were the best people around? Well, as we shall see in the weeks ahead, Aaron's sons violate God's instructions two chapters hence, with terrible consequences. If God were choosing priests based on their foreseen faithfulness, some other family might have been better.

All we can really say is that God chose them because he chose them. And other Israelites might have been dismayed: "Why didn't God choose me! I would have been a better priest than Nadab!" From a human point of view, that might be correct; there may have been others who, in some sense, were better qualified. But God's kingdom is not a meritocracy. God is sovereign. He chooses his priests.

Hundreds of years later, Paul would elaborate on this point when writing to a group of priests:

26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.<sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. . . . <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. (1 Corinthians 1:1-31)

Third, God tells Moses to bring the garments. Next week we will look into these garments in more detail, as they are described thoroughly later in the chapter. But note now that clothing is used many places in Scripture as a symbol for our character, or a symbol of our position before God. God provides the clothing for the priests just as he provides our righteousness; and the priests are to take care to dress themselves according to God's plan.

Fourth, God has Moses bring oil. In our discussion of the present or grain offering, we noted that oil in Scripture is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. When Samuel anoints David as king, he pours oil on his head, indicating that God's Spirit was now indwelling David. The priests have a sacred task to perform, and they cannot do it without the Spirit working within them. So the oil is a necessary part of their ordination.

Fifth, they brought all the requirements for the sacrifices. We have studied these sacrifices in detail already. God particularly notes the need for a sin offering, for these priests were not perfect. They too had failed. As we stated, God did not choose them because they were perfect, or even better than their fellows. So their sins need to be covered, before they can act as God's representatives in assuring others that they too can receive forgiveness for sins. So the priests need to sacrifice a sin offering for themselves, and then to sacrifice offerings for the congregation at large. But remember from the earlier chapters that the priests also eat many of the offerings. The priests are to feed on God and His word, to nourish themselves with Him, to fill themselves with Him.

Sixth, note that God tells Moses to bring all the people together: young, old, male, female, rich, poor. This consecration of the priesthood was vital for all to see; everyone's participation was

required.

Finally, note the place of the assembly: At the tent of meeting, at the tabernacle. This tent is the symbol of God in their midst, the symbol of God dwelling among them. The priests are to be a living representation of God living among them, so their ordination takes place at the tabernacle.

#### Conclusion

We will continue our examination of Leviticus 8:1-36 next week. But, in closing, let us consider both the privilege and the responsibility we have as priests. As a priest, you have the privilege of approaching God directly, through the work of your high priest, Jesus Christ. As the author of Hebrews states:

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the son of God . . . let us boldly approach the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:1-16) This is your privilege: And what a privilege it is! You don't need to go through any other person, you don't need to approach a member of the clergy or some super-Christian -- God has called you to be His priest, and he says you yourself can approach his throne directly. Do so! Don't say, "Oh, I'm not good enough. I can't stand before God." Of course you can't! No one can!. But if you have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, God has declared that you are HIS, that you are HIS priest, and that you can pass through the veil into the inner court, into His very presence. And Jesus, the great high priest who understands your every need, your every temptation, is there, waiting to provide you with grace and strength. Look to him! Depend on him! And along with this privilege comes a responsibility: You are God's priest! You are set apart by God. And you are set apart for God. You are to be God's representative to a hurting, fallen world. You are to provide that world with God's truths, accurately applied to the needs of those around you. And you are to live a life worthy of that calling. As priests of God, you have the keys to the kingdom of heaven, you have the gospel message. You have access to the truths that can change lives; you have access to the throneroom of God, where all strength and power and might reside. Use it! Be what God intends! Be God's priest!

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 9/6/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him. Two articles on the priesthood of all believers were also especially helpful: one by Timothy George <[http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ03/article1\\_fr.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ03/article1_fr.html)> and one by P.G. Matthew <<http://www.gracevalley.org/articles/Priesthood.html>>.

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## 01.08. Clothes Make the Man (Lev\_8:4-9; Lev\_21:1-24; Lev\_22:1-33)

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Clothes Make the Man A sermon on Leviticus 8:1-36; Leviticus 21:1-24; Leviticus 22:1-33 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, Sept. 13, 1998 Do clothes make the man? Are you what you wear?

Some fashion consultants seem to think so.

Consider this statement from an ad on the Internet:

Fashion Tips for Job Interviews

You don't have to have an MBA to strive for that professional look. From MBA Style Magazine, advice on everything from How to Buy an Interview Suit to Undressing for Success: Boxers or Briefs at the Interview. Also learn how to choose a necktie, Select the right shirt or blouse, find the right colors and patterns to wear for an interview and even choose the right socks.

Don't get too hopeful about the quality of that advice: The number one suggestion for men with regard to socks: Make sure they match.

Another internet site puts it this way:

Every time you enter a room you are making a statement : a fashion statement. . . Clothing is image projection.

Pay attention to that last statement: Clothing is image projection. At one level, we Christians shouldn't be concerned with image projection: Remember when Samuel went to anoint a new king from among the sons of Jesse? The boys parade before Samuel one by one -- the first is the eldest, Eliab. Samuel sees the tall, broad-shouldered, handsome young man and thinks, "Surely, he is the one!" But God says to Samuel:

"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7) As all of Scripture makes clear, God wants our hearts, he wants true devotion; he doesn't want only the appearance of devotion. God doesn't want us only to go through the motions, he doesn't want us simply to appear to belong to him; he tell each of us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength." In that sense, outward appearances don't matter. But we've come to a section in Leviticus where God lays out explicit instructions for the clothes of the priests. If God's primary interest is the condition of our hearts, why does he go to such pains to prescribe clothing?

God cares because "Clothing is Image Projection." God uses the clothing of the high priest to project an image, to project the image of Jesus, to project the image of what each of us should be when we fulfill our priestly roles. So through these clothes, God teaches us valuable lessons about his Son. So open your Bibles with me to Leviticus 8:1-36, so that we can learn about the image God projects through the priests' clothing. Recall from our discussion last week that God planned

from the beginning to create a nation of priests, and that we, the church, are the fulfillment of that plan. Every person saved by the blood of Jesus is a priest, is called to serve as a priest. In this priestly role we have direct access to God the Father, and are called to shine the light of God's word on the difficult circumstances facing our neighbors in this sin-filled world. Recall also that God alone calls priests; they are not volunteers, responding to Moses' plea for workers.

We'll begin reading in Leviticus 8:1 :

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

2 "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering, and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread; 3 and assemble all the congregation at the doorway of the tent of meeting." 4 So Moses did just as the LORD commanded him. When the congregation was assembled at the doorway of the tent of meeting, 5 Moses said to the congregation, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded to do." 6 Then Moses had Aaron and his sons come near, and washed them with water.

Before we get to the clothing, allow me to make two quick notes.

We're going to see strange things in the rest of this chapter; for example, Moses takes blood and puts it on Aaron's right earlobe, and the big toe of his right foot. Moses indicates right here that these are GOD's words, God's commands. None of this originated in Moses' head. God has very specific reasons for all this to take place exactly according to his command.

Second, note that the first item of business is to wash Aaron and his sons. What does this signify?

God prescribes ceremonial washing in many cases in the Law. This stands for the purification from worldly uncleanness, preparing oneself to come before God. The New Testament amplifies this in several places: In Ephesians 5:1-33, while discussing marriage, Paul describes the relationship of Christ to the church. He says:

26 Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

God uses His word to sanctify us, to set us apart for His purposes, to wash us and cleanse us, so that we might be what God intends us to be.

Jesus makes a similar statement in his high priestly prayer in John 17:1-26 :

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)

Jesus is saying, "Make these my followers holy; set them apart BY YOUR WORD." Once again, God's uses his word to mark us as his, to make us whole, to transform us into what he intends us to be. God's living and active word penetrates to our very core, sheds light on our failures, an empowers us to lives lives worthy of God's calling.

If we are to be effective in our role as priests, we need cleansing of the word, we need to be set apart, made whole by God's word living and reigning in us.

We'll come back to that idea; let's now look at the priests' clothing:

7 And he put the tunic on him and girded him with the sash, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him; and he girded him with the artistic band of the ephod, with which he tied it to him. 8 He then placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. 9 He also placed the turban on his head, and on the turban, at its front, he placed the golden plate, the holy crown, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

While the priest's clothes don't make the man, they symbolize what the man should be. We'll bring out three aspects of this symbolism:

The priests' position before God, his inner righteousness;

The priests' responsibility for the people, his ambassadorial and intercessory ministry;

The priests' position before man, the purity of his lifestyle

We'll begin by considering the priest's position before God. Scripture consistently uses the image of new clothes provided by God to stand for our righteousness in His eyes.

Consider first Isaiah 61:10

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, Salvation and righteousness are clothes that God provides. And he not only provides them but also dresses us in them.

Recall also Luke 15:1-32, the story of the prodigal son. The son tells his father that he wishes the father were dead, takes his share of the inheritance, and squanders it. He becomes destitute, then comes to himself. He returns home, and says, "Father, I have sinned against you and against God; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the Father cuts him off, calling out:

"Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet." (Luke 15:22) The son returns, stinking and in rags. He is not worthy to be treated as a son, and he sure doesn't look or smell like a son! But the Father dresses him! The Father makes clear to all that this is his beloved son. He dresses him in the clothes of the son, showing his acceptance, showing that he is truly a part of the family.

I love the way God uses the "image projection" of clothes in both of those cases. But my favorite example is found in the book of Zechariah, chapter 3. Zechariah has a vision of Joshua, the High Priest, standing in God's presence, but dressed in filthy clothes. And Satan is at Joshua's right hand, accusing him. Perhaps he is saying, "How can you stand here! Look at yourself! You are not worthy to come into the presence of an earthly king -- why do you think you can stand before God? God can have no part of your dirt, of your filth!" Let's read beginning in the third verse:

3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. 4 And the angel spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes." 5 Then I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by. Do you catch the image here? Priests must be clothed with God's righteousness! On our own, we are like

Joshua standing before God in filthy garments -- Satan has every right to accuse us because no one dressed like that can approach the king of the universe! On our own, we are like the returning prodigal son: dirty, grimy, smelly, stinking. But when we come with a broken and contrite heart, dirty and smelly as we are, God gives us new clothes, he accepts us to be his priests, he accepts us as his sons, he gives us garments of salvation, priestly garments.

So, first of all, the clothes display our standing before God. Let's turn now to the breastpiece, which displays the priest's responsibility for the people.

There is a lengthy description of this article of clothing in Exodus 28:1-43. In that chapter, God explains that the breastpiece is to have twelve precious stones sown into the fabric, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. And the breastpiece is made in such a way that it hangs from the priest's shoulders. Turn to Exodus 28:29 :

"And Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually."

Isn't that a powerful image? Whenever the high priest enters the holy place, he carries all the people with him, directly over his heart. He goes into the holy place for them, interceding for them, representing them. This is first and foremost an image of Jesus -- entering the holy place, coming into God's presence bearing all of us on his shoulders. He wears us over his heart, over the seat of his love, carrying us into God's presence, where we could not go without him. And his carrying of us into God's presence, offering atonement for us, makes us holy and righteous before God. But the image also is relevant to us in our role as priests. We too must carry others before God, we too must carry others over our hearts as we intercede for them before God. God didn't make us priests only to allow us to stand before him. No! He gives each of us a ministry, so that we might be involved in proclaiming his truths and bringing others before him. So do you carry others continually before the Lord? Do you care? Do you love?

Note that the breastpiece also includes the Urim and the Thummin. We don't know exactly what these items were, but they were used to provide God's guidance to the Israelites when they were faced with difficult circumstances. Just so, our priestly ministry includes opening the word of God and applying it to the world's problems. We are entrusted with God's wisdom and insight, as laid out for us in Holy Scripture. Here are the answers to the difficult problems of life, the way to true love, true joy and true peace. We offer that to a hurting world in our priestly ministry.

Let us now turn our attention to the turban. Leviticus 8:9 reads:

He also placed the turban on his head, and on the turban, at its front, he placed the golden plate, the holy crown So Moses puts a cloth headpiece on Aaron, and on this he places "a plate, a crown." That is strange; this item is called both a plate and a crown.

It's interesting to note that there are two primary Hebrew words translated "crown" in the Old Testament. One is a symbol of earthly authority -- this is the word used, for example, for the crown that David takes from the head of a conquered king. David removes the crown from the conquered king's head and puts it on his own. He assumes the earthly authority of that king. But the more prominent word implies consecration instead of authority, being set apart by God for a sacred task. This is the word used for the crowns of the Israelite monarchs, and this same word is used here for

the priest. Thus, "crown" in Leviticus 8:9 does not symbolize authority so much as it symbolizes God's setting apart the priest for a special, sacred task.

Exodus 28:1-43, once again, provides some additional details that clarify this idea. Consider Exodus 28:36-38 :

You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the LORD.' And you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. And it shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD. This passage makes clear that the gold crown was not circular in shape, but was indeed a flat plate. It was a sign of Aaron's holiness, of his consecration to God -- and, just so no one would make any mistake about that, the engraving on the front reads, "Holy to the Lord!" "Holy to the Lord!" This statement was always on his forehead when he was acting out his priestly role.

Imagine yourself with those words on your forehead. Everyone you encounter sees on your forehead, "Holy to the Lord."

I have news for you: You do have those words written on your forehead! When you claim to be a Christian, you are proclaiming that you are set apart by God, that you are empowered by God for a sacred task, that you are God's agent and representative in this world. "Holy to the Lord!"

You are a priest before God -- so you are Holy before him. How should you then live?

Here we come to the third truth symbolized by the priests' clothes. We have seen how the clothes symbolize the position of the priest before God; He gives us new clothes so we, like Joshua, can ignore Satan's accusations and stand accepted before God.

Second, we have seen how the breastpiece symbolizes our responsibility before men, the ministry that God gives us to shine the truth of His word on this hurting world, and to carry the needs of the people before God. But the clothes also symbolize our need for practical holiness, our need to have our inner righteousness before God shine forth in the character of our lives. Indeed, we will be ineffective in our ministry to others unless we show this type of character in our daily life. For every Christian is called to serve as a priest; but, unfortunately, not every Christian is qualified to serve as a priest. We are all, figuratively, sons of Aaron and thus called by God to the priesthood; but some of us live in such a way that we can have no effective ministry -- our lives invalidate the word of God.

Leviticus 21:1-24 and Leviticus 22:1-33 of Leviticus elaborate on this point -- the practical holiness necessary for an effective ministry. We find the theme of these two chapters in Leviticus 21:6, which reads

They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they present the offerings by fire to the LORD, the bread of their God; so they shall be holy.

Note that this verse tells us that priests have two tasks: the task of showing the importance of Christ's death to the world ("present the offerings by fire"), and the task of feeding continually on Jesus, the bread of life. If we through our lives profane the name of God, if we live lives that are

unworthy of this calling, then we will be ineffective and unproductive and unfulfilled in our ministry. But if we take this task seriously, and say to God, "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee," if we offer ourselves to God, and our members as instruments of righteousness, then God will use us to accomplish his purposes -- and we will have a deep-seated excitement and fulfillment in the ministry God gives us.

We'll only briefly touch on two points from those chapters -- I encourage you to consider them prayerfully as you evaluate the impact of your own priestly ministry. So here are two ways that we can disqualify ourselves from ministry:

First, Leviticus 21:1-24 explains that the priests are to have very limited contact with the dead. Touching the dead made the Israelites unclean until they were purified -- meaning that an ordinary Israelite who had touched a dead person could not even enter the tabernacle until after his purification. But a priest was not to touch the dead at all, except for the closest of relatives. He was not even to touch his wife's dead body.

What relevance is this to us today? Clearly the specific instruction no longer holds; what is its symbolic significance?

I would like to suggest with Ray Stedman that touching the dead signifies our operating "in the flesh," our attempting to fulfill our priestly ministry by our own power, using worldly methods. This is deadly to our ministry. When we try to accomplish God's purposes by our own power instead of relying on him -- when we depend on ourselves instead of the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, when we use worldly techniques to attract people to Christ -- we invalidate our ministry. Oh, we may "succeed" in getting people to come to our event or our church, but in the end we will accomplish nothing of spiritual significance.

How many Christians and Christian ministries have fallen prey to this trap! So much of the church today is involved in worldly techniques, from ways we raise money to ways we try to attract people to church. We provide entertainment instead of the unadulterated word of God; we water down our message so that we don't offend, yet somehow think that that watered down message will save people. In our personal lives, we face the same temptations. We think that by OUR energy and OUR power and OUR hard work that we will accomplish God's purposes. We don't see results so we try harder and harder -- to no avail.

Jesus says: "Apart from me you can do nothing." Apart from Him and his power, we can accomplish exactly nothing of lasting significance.

Don't disqualify yourself from your ministry. Don't depend on the flesh. The second way we can disqualify ourselves from ministry is found in Leviticus 21:16-24. No priest with a physical defect is to approach the Lord. Those with defects were still sons of Aaron and thus could feed on the priestly food, but they could not minister in the tabernacle.

Again, we know that the specific restriction no longer holds; there is now no earthly tabernacle, and the truths of the gospel message are available to all people, whether or not they have physical defects. So what is the spiritual significance of this restriction?

Through these physical defects, God is picturing the spiritual defects that keep us from having an effective ministry.

Those who are blind or have a defect in the eye are disqualified. For we must see the truths of the word, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we must open our eyes to the needs of this world lost in sin. We must be able to see in order to have an effective ministry.

Those who are lame, those with broken feet are disqualified. The spiritually lame may be able to see, but they are not walking with the Lord, they are not living out the truths of the gospel in their daily lives -- and thus they invalidate the very words that they speak.

Those who are dwarfs are disqualified -- so many churches are filled with spiritual dwarfs! God gives each of us opportunities to learn and grow, to expand our horizons and to step out in faith. When we don't take those opportunities, when we become satisfied with our spiritual stature, our growth is stunted -- and, as Peter puts it in his second epistle, we become ineffective and unproductive. The author of the book of Hebrews writes these words to spiritual dwarfs: For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity (Hebrews 5:12-14; Hebrews 6:1)

Let us all press on to maturity. Don't be satisfied with being a spiritual midget. Become what God intends you to be. Step out in faith.

Conclusion So do clothes make the man? Well, I'd agree with the advice to make sure your socks match. But in the end our outward appearance matters little. God looks at our hearts. But God commands that his Israelite priests dress in a certain way -- and the priests' clothing projects a rich image, teaching us an abundance of spiritual truth. We have considered three of these truths:

We are righteous before God -- our position is secure;

We are called to a ministry -- bearing the people on our shoulders, shining the light of God's truth on the world around us;

We are called to practical holiness -- living lives worthy of God's calling, depending on his strength alone to accomplish his purposes.

Every Christian is called to be a priest -- but many of us are not effective priests. We are overwhelmed with work, we complain about our opportunities to serve, we chafe at being different from others. If that is true of you, then I've got news for you: You are called to be a priest, but you have disqualified yourself. You will have no effective ministry, you will have no joy in ministry, until you follow God's plan for the priesthood. But if you accept this calling, if you consecrate yourself fully to God's plan for your life, if you continually offer yourself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him -- then you will find intense joy and excitement in ministry. For God has a plan for you, God made you for this very purpose, God put you here in Williamstown to show his love and his wisdom to particular persons. You have on your forehead the words HOLY TO THE LORD -- and you are Holy for a specific purpose. Opening up the word of God and applying God's solutions to the problems faced by all of our neighbors is the most exciting task imaginable -- for only in His word are solutions found; only through this word can we find true love, joy, and peace.

So where are you? How do the priestly clothes fit?

Let us close by singing three verses from the hymn, "Take My Life and Let it Be."

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love.

Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.

Take my heart; it is thine own. It shall be thy royal throne.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 9/13/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him. The statement that our churches are filled with spiritual dwarfs is taken directly from his sermon.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## 01.09. The Effective Priest (Lev\_8:10-36; Lev\_9:1-24)

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The Effective Priest A Sermon on Leviticus 8:1-36; Leviticus 9:1-24 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, Oct. 4, 1998

Early this year a long-time friend phoned Howard Hendricks, Professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. It seems that this friend was moving to the Dallas area and wanted Howard's recommendation for a church to attend. "Well, tell me, what kind of church are you looking for?" asked Howard. The friend laid out a long series of requirements, including the theological position of the church, the quality of personal relationships, and the absence of cliques and groups. Howard responded, "Friend, you're looking for a perfect church. I don't know of a church like that, but if you find one . . . don't join it. You'll ruin it!" Howard went on to tell his friend, "Do you have people in your church? Well, if you've got people, you've got problems." In our series on Leviticus, we have been studying the offerings and the priesthood, these provisions God made to deal with the problems of the people of Israel. For when you've got people, you've got problems. God knows each and every one of our problems, our shortcomings. Through the priesthood he pictures both how we can overcome these problems, and how we can minister to our fellow believers who face similar problems.

You recall that the offerings dealt with five basic human needs:

the need to belong, as represented by the whole burnt offering,

the need to respond to God with your very self as represented in the grain or present offering,

the need for peace in the midst of the trials of this life as represented in the peace offering,

the need for confession and forgiveness as represented in the sin offering,

and the need for reconciliation as represented in the trespass offering.

In foreshadowing Jesus' death on the cross, these offerings display God reaching out to man. Through the person of Jesus Christ, God gives us true love, true joy, and true peace -- what all of us desire most.

We also spent two weeks examining the priesthood. We noted that God uses the priesthood for "image projection," for showing us truths about ourselves, and truths about Jesus. Beginning at Mt Sinai, God laid out his plan for establishing a nation of priests. But Israel failed to live up to God's requirements. Peter tells us that we, the church, have become that royal priesthood. Every Christian, then, is called to priestly service. We emphasized that this reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is not a license for each of us to interpret the Bible any way that we like, but rather an opportunity, an empowering to serve others. In addition, we have noted several characteristics of priests. When the time came to establish the priesthood, God chose Aaron's family to serve. He didn't call for volunteers -- God did the choosing. Second, the chosen priests were washed prior to their ordination, symbolizing the "washing of water with the word," the

cleansing of the word of God in our lives. Third, God prescribed a specific set of clothing for the priests which is rich in imagery. The outer tunic represents our position before God, clothed with his righteousness. The breastpiece, woven with twelve stones for the twelve tribes of Israel, represents our ministry to people, our responsibility to take the people before us whenever we enter God's presence. And the golden plate on the turban or headpiece, you recall, is inscribed with these words: "Holy to the Lord." This shows our need for practical holiness, our need to live lives worthy of our calling, if we are to have an effective priesthood.

Leviticus 21:1-24 gives some examples of how we can be disqualified from priestly service if we fail to observe practical holiness. We are not to depend on the flesh as we minister, we are not to depend on our own efforts. Also, the blind, the lame, and the stunted are disqualified from service -- effective priests must see the truths of God's word, must walk day by day in the light of His truth, and must grow to maturity, not being content with remaining babes in the faith. So Leviticus 21:1-24 provides us with negative requirements: don't be blind, or lame, or stunted, don't depend on the flesh. This morning we will conclude our examination of the ordination of the priests in Leviticus 8:1-36; Leviticus 9:1-24 by focus on the positive aspects of God's equipping us for effective ministry. These, then, are the positive requirements for effective ministry. So please turn in your Bibles with me to Leviticus 8:10. We will not read together all of Leviticus 8:1-36 and Leviticus 9:1-24, although I encourage you to read this section in its entirety on your own.

10 Moses then took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. 11 And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them. 12 Then he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him.

After washing and dressing the high priest, Moses takes the anointing oil and sprinkles it on the tabernacle itself, the altar, and the basin; he then pours it over Aaron's head. As we have pointed out before, the oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. This represents the flip side of our not depending on the flesh. We must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than on our own abilities or on human methods of motivation and control. In Leviticus 8:14-21 Moses presents the sin offering and the whole burnt offering for the priests. Since we have considered these offerings in some detail in the past, we will move quickly here. Do note, however, that Aaron and his sons must place their hands on the animal, they lean their weight on the animal that is going to be slaughtered. Through this action they identify themselves with the animal to be killed. This identification is twofold: they are indicating their willingness to die to self, and they are acknowledging their own sinfulness, their need for a substitutionary death.

Leviticus 8:22 begins the description of a different type of offering, the Ordination Offering. Let's read from this verse to the end of the chapter:

22 Then he presented the second ram, the ram of ordination; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. 23 And Moses slaughtered it and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. 24 He also had Aaron's sons come near; and Moses put some of the blood on the lobe of their right ear, and on the thumb of their right hand, and on the big toe of their right foot. Moses then sprinkled the rest of the blood around on the altar. 25 And he took the fat, and the fat tail, and all the fat that was on the entrails, and the lobe of the liver and the two kidneys and their fat and

the right thigh. 26 And from the basket of unleavened bread that was before the LORD, he took one unleavened cake and one cake of bread mixed with oil and one wafer, and placed them on the portions of fat and on the right thigh. 27 He then put all these on the hands of Aaron and on the hands of his sons, and presented them as a wave offering before the LORD. 28 Then Moses took them from their hands and offered them up in smoke on the altar with the burnt offering. They were an ordination offering for a soothing aroma; it was an offering by fire to the LORD. 29 Moses also took the breast and presented it for a wave offering before the LORD; it was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 30 So Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood which was on the altar, and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him; and he consecrated Aaron, his garments, and his sons, and the garments of his sons with him.

31 Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons, "Boil the flesh at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and eat it there together with the bread which is in the basket of the ordination offering, just as I commanded, saying, 'Aaron and his sons shall eat it.' 32 And the remainder of the flesh and of the bread you shall burn in the fire. 33 And you shall not go outside the doorway of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the day that the period of your ordination is fulfilled; for he will ordain you through seven days. 34 The LORD has commanded to do as has been done this day, to make atonement on your behalf. 35 At the doorway of the tent of meeting, moreover, you shall remain day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the LORD, that you may not die, for so I have been commanded." 36 Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the LORD had commanded through Moses.

I want us to focus on the strange blood ritual described here. But first let us briefly consider three other elements of the ordination.

First, Moses takes the fat and the kidneys and burns them before the Lord. Recall that fat has positive connotations for the Israelites, not negative as in our culture. The fat represents all that is best in life. In offering that up to God, Moses and the priests are acknowledging that God is the source of all that is good, of all the richness of this life.

Second, the priests are separated from the assembly for seven days prior to the beginning of their ministry. They must stay at the doorway of the tabernacle. Once again, this pictures their holiness, their separateness, their call to belong to God in a special way.

Third, during these seven days they are to eat the consecrated bread. This is, in part, a foreshadowing of our communion services; they are drawing their sustenance from God, feeding on Him and His word.

Let us now turn to the blood ritual. Read Leviticus 8:23 with me once again:

23 And Moses slaughtered it and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.

Moses then does the same to Aaron's sons. What possible meaning can there be for this strange procedure? The blood symbolized both death to self and atonement through the death of another. So when the priests see the blood of the sacrifice placed on their bodies, they are to recall their need to die to self daily, hourly, and the cleansing that they have received through the sacrifice for

sins. So why is this blood put on the ear, the thumb, and the big toe. What does this have to do with having an effective priesthood? Let us look at these in turn: An effective priest must hear the word of the Lord as one redeemed. As you can imagine, with six kids in our family at times our house can be rather noisy. Sometimes our children have a difficult time hearing me when I call them. But I have noticed something interesting: Some words are easier to hear than others! Even when the noise level is high, I can almost whisper, "Would anyone like to have some ice cream?" -- and six kids will show up at once. But if, with the same noise level, I call out, "It's time to clean up!" -- everyone continues playing, as if they are unable to hear me.

Now, we are in the process of teaching our children to be attuned to Mommy and Daddy's voices, to hear us regardless of what else is going on in the house. But we all have a tendency to ignore what we don't want to hear, don't we? For us as priests, it is absolutely vital that we attune our ears to God. We must hear God when he speaks, and then submit to him, whether he says what we want to hear or not. Each of us must hear God as one who has died to self, so that our own desires do not affect our obedience; hear his words as those that come from one who dearly loves us, one who came and died so that we might live. So our ears are stained with blood, to remind us to listen and obey without thought of self, and to listen to the words of the God to whom we have access through that very blood. When we do that, the word of God comes alive. We become like the Thessalonians, to whom Paul wrote: And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13) An effective priest must hear the word of the Lord as one redeemed. An effective priest works with hands that constantly remind him of his need for cleansing -- and his having been cleansed.

Now let's consider the thumb. Have you every considered how useless your hand would be without a thumb? Without the thumb, you could do almost nothing with your hand. Indeed, some of you will recall that an ancient punishment described in Judges 1:1-36 involved cutting off the thumbs and big toes of captured kings. Thumbs are vital for work. So the thumb, I suggest, stands for our work. As we work, we are to see Christ's blood on our hands. We must acknowledge that on our own we can accomplish nothing for God. But when we are cleansed by the blood of the lamb, we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength. With this reminder ever before us, we can't be self-righteous, we can't be proud, we can't boast. Whatever we accomplish of lasting value must result only from God's work, must result only from that blood on our thumbs. On our own we are sinners in need of cleansing; by God's mercy, we are cleansed and empowered to accomplish His tasks.

Also, the blood on our thumbs keeps us from feeling offended or unappreciated. The blood on our thumbs keeps us from being discouraged when people don't respond to our ministry. For, you see, we are not looking for the praise of men. Our task is to be faithful to our calling, to work selflessly at whatever God calls us to, and to leave the results to him.

Remember Paul's "thorn in the flesh?" Paul felt that this physical limitation was hindering his ability to fulfill his ministry. Paul was discouraged that despite repeated prayer God did not heal him. But God answered Paul, saying,

9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am

well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:1-21) As you do your work as a priest, remember that there is no room for self. See Christ's blood on your hands. Know that on your own you can accomplish nothing, but that through continual dependence upon God you will have a rewarding and effective ministry, accomplishing all that God intends.

So, the blood on the ear symbolizes our need to hear as those who are redeemed; the blood on the thumb symbolizes our need to work as those who are redeemed. We turn now to the big toe.

What is the role of your big toe? An effective priest walks with God, knowing that he is a sinner, yet cleansed from all sin.

Without a big toe, walking is pretty tough. In Hebrew, "walk" is frequently used to connote the moral quality of one's life. So in Genesis, Enoch and Noah are said to have "walked with God," meaning they lived their lives with a constant sense of His presence, living uprightly before him. Similarly, in Genesis 17:1-27 God tells Abraham, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless." So the bloody big toe symbolizes the moral quality of our lives, as we live conscious that the blood of Jesus has cleansed us from all sin. Each step, each minute of the day, the toe goes before us, red with blood, reminding us that we are covered, we are justified, we are right with God because of Jesus' sacrifice. We need that cleansing every day, every step of the way -- and God provides.

Thus, the bloody toe reminds us that we need to keep short accounts with God. We fall again and again -- and we need to look to that blood on our feet, reminding ourselves that we are ordained by God for a special task that requires purity. We then need to confess that sin so that we might be forgiven, and once more serve as an effective priest. So the blood is a reminder of our weakness, our need for confession. Just as importantly, however, the bloody toe is a reminder that complete forgiveness is ours through that blood. For Satan will accuse you, saying, "Who are you to think that God will work use you! Look at what you have done! Aren't you ashamed? God could never use someone who has done that! Just give up!" When Satan confronts you with your unworthiness, how should you respond? Point to your toe! Look to that blood on your toe, and know that each step of the way, every step of your life is covered by the blood of Jesus. Every mistake, every sin, every failure is redeemed by this most precious blood. So, yes, you on your own are unworthy -- but, praise God, because of Jesus' blood you can boldly approach the very throne of God. And, praise God, you have a ministry not based on your own worthiness, but based on what Christ has accomplished in your heart. So that is the meaning of the blood ritual: We must hear, we must work, and we must walk as those who both need redemption and are redeemed. The result of an effective priesthood

Let us turn briefly to Leviticus 9:1-24. We left Aaron and his sons isolated in the tabernacle for seven days. On the eighth day they come out and, for the first time, offer sacrifices for themselves and for the people of Israel. Can you imagine the excitement? God has described all these sacrifices and the ordination in detail -- and now, at long last, God's people are able to witness these wonderful pictures of God's provisions for meeting their needs. We have previously considered the details of these sacrifices, so let us read only Leviticus 9:22-24 :

22 Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. 24 Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

See the result of an effective priesthood? When God's chosen priests are filled with the Holy Spirit, live on God's word, listen to his voice, walk in the knowledge of his redeeming love, and serve according to his plan, GOD IS GLORIFIED. The fire of the Lord bursts forth and consumes the offering. And the people shout -- they are overcome as they see God in action. This is the result of priestly ministry.

Just so, we glorify God when we act as effective priests. When we die to self and live for God, by his power and by his word, we display God's love and power just as Aaron and his sons displayed God's love and power.

Let me give you an example of this. In the tape series "Growing Kids God's Way," Gary Ezzo tells of one day when he was suffering from UMS. Now, some of you may not be familiar with the male disease, UMS, but I suspect you all have felt the brunt of it. UMS stands for Ugly Mood Syndrome. Gary had had a tough day at the office when everything imaginable had gone wrong. To make matters worse, he had left the office late and was trying to rush -- but hit every red light on the way home. Upon arrival, his Mood was really Ugly. As he was about to enter the house, he heard a noise in the garage. He entered -- and saw his daughter Amy in the midst of opening a package, with styrofoam peanuts surrounding her. She looked up and said, "Hi Dad! Did you have a good day?" Gary surveyed the situation and blew up: "Amy! I've told you not to let styrofoam get all over the floor -- that stuff's impossible to clean up. And look, my hammer is missing! I bought hammers for each of you girls so you wouldn't use mine. You're responsible for all this, young lady, and you're going to deal with it!" Amy just looked at her dad for a second, then stood up, put her arms out, and hugged him. "Daddy," she said, "you must have had a terrible day. Just let me hold you." Just let me hold you.

Gary comments on her actions: "When I was least approachable, she approached me; when I was least lovely, she loved me." Amy was acting out Jesus' statement: "Even as I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34) On the day of this story, Amy had an effective priesthood. She served her father as a priest, acting out God's love for him. And when she made that little sacrifice, when she yielded up her right to lash back, when she chose to serve in love rather than to speak back in her father's tones, she glorified God! God's fire burst forth from his tabernacle and consumed that sacrifice, so that the sweet savor of its burning filled the air -- the glory of the Lord was made manifest by this young girl's act of love. When we act as God's priests, letting his love overflow our hearts and spread to the world around us, God is glorified -- God's character is revealed through our little, seemingly trivial acts.

Conclusion This is the God we serve: A God who loves us so much that he redeems us through his own suffering, a God who provides us with all we need for service, a God who has foreordained a ministry for every Christian. This God cleanses us, equips us, meets our every need, and then shows the world what He is like through us.

Isn't this different from many prevalent ideas about God, even in the church?

God is not standing there with a stick, waiting to bop you on the head when you fall. God is not your judge, demanding that you summon up the willpower to live a perfect life, looking down at you, always dissatisfied. God is not some stern, hard schoolmaster like Mr Brocklehurst in Jane Eyre, longing to humiliate you for every careless act.

No. You have dug your own hole, through your sins you have separated yourself from God -- but God provides the way out. If you trust in Him, if you receive Jesus Christ as Lord -- and the invitation to do so is open to all -- then you are family, you are God's beloved, and God -- far from being the uncaring, unfeeling schoolmaster -- is overflowing with tender love towards you. When you sin, when you stumble once again into a habit you thought you had left behind, God's word to you is, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). God's word to you is, "I have loved you." God's word to you is, "There is now no condemnation, there is now no judgment for those who are in Christ Jesus." God's word to you is, "nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." God's word to you today is to behold, to look, to see how great is God's love for you -- so great that he calls you his very children. My brothers and sisters, no matter what sin you have fallen into, no matter what you may have thought or said or done, when you humbly approach the Lord of the universe and say, with a broken and contrite heart "I have sinned," then you are one of the family. You are free indeed. Earthly consequences for your sin there may well be, but you are right with the God of all, and his love will hold you fast for all eternity. So walk in the blood. Listen as one redeemed. Work with the blood. Each day offer up a burnt offering, knowing that God has made you his and accepts you wholly as his. Each day offer up that sin offering, acknowledging the inadequacy of even your best efforts. Each day think of that oil flowing over Aaron's head, the Holy Spirit filling you, enabling you to live and serve according to God's plan. And then know that you are equipped to minister to all these other hurting people, all these others who are deceived by sin, who feel rejected, who feel condemned. Then you can be an effective priest -- not a perfect person who lives by a list of rules, but a redeemed person, a person whose conscience is clear before God, a priest who knows human frailty because he sees himself with open eyes, a priest who offers the promise of God's love and power and acceptance to those who so desperately need it.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 10/4/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him. The opening story by Howard Hendricks comes from his sermon at PBC on 9/20/98, which is also available on the PBC web site. The tape series "Growing Kids God's Way" by Gary and Marie Ezzo can be ordered through their web site <<http://www.gfi.org/>>. While not agreeing with every detail of their recommendations for child rearing, Beth and I have profited from listening to these tapes, and encourage others to do so.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## 01.10. The Disqualified Priest (Lev\_10:1-20)

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The Disqualified Priest A Sermon on Leviticus 10:1-20 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, Oct. 11, 1998 For several weeks we have been studying the priesthood of all believers -- how God has ordained that every Christian has a priestly ministry. God calls each of us to glorify him in our lives so that we might show his character and his love to this hurting world in which we live. We do this, in part, through exercising our spiritual gifts, whatever those may be -- teaching, helps, prayer, giving, encouragement, and all the others. But we also do this by displaying the fruit of the Spirit, the godly character that results from our maturing in Christ: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, goodness, self-control. We saw last week <levitpriest3.htm> how a young girl, Amy Ezzo, did just that -- her father Gary came in yelling and screaming, completely unreasonable -- yet she responded with kindness and love. Amy served as a priest to her father, sacrificing her right to annoyance, choosing instead to display God's love.

We've noted that God is the one who chooses priests, not men; that their position before God is secure, as denoted by the tunic or coat of righteousness God gives them to wear. Priests are called to a ministry to men, as symbolized by the breastpiece, which was inlaid with twelve precious stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel. And priests are called to be practically holy, as symbolized by the turban and its gold plate, which was inscribed with these words: "Holy to the Lord." Last week, we saw how God prepared the priests for ministry by having Moses put the blood of the ordination sacrifice on their ears, thumbs, and big toes. The priests were to hear the word of God as those who are redeemed, to work always conscious of their need for dependence on God, and to walk, to live their lives dying to self and confident that they are righteous before God because of the blood shed for them.

All these symbols display the calling and qualifications of the priests; they all are rich in symbolism for us as priests. But we have also seen that some of those called to be priests were disqualified, as related in Leviticus 21:1-24, by depending on the flesh, being blind to the truths of God's word, or failing to grow in their love and knowledge of God. This morning we come to Leviticus 10:1-20. Moses has just followed God's instructions to ordain five men as priests, Aaron and his four sons. Two of those five now disqualify themselves from ministry -- and God responds dramatically. This morning, we will shed light on the reasons for God's response, then draw lessons for our own priestly ministry from this event.

Remember how Leviticus 9:1-24 ends. Aaron and his sons were isolated for seven days in the tabernacle, then they come out and present offerings for the people of Israel. We'll pick up the story in Leviticus 9:22 :

22 Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. 24 Then fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the

burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

God shows these people that he is pleased with the offering, he accepts the sacrifice. The fire of the Lord blazes forth and consumes the offering. God's character, his redemption, and his holiness are displayed by the priests careful adherence to God's instructions.

Let's keep reading in Leviticus 10:1-20 :

1 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. 2 And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

3 Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent. 4 Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Come forward, carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp." 5 So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said. The same fire that displayed God's acceptance of the offering now kills the very priests God had chosen. God showed that he was pleased with the previous offering; now he shows through the same type of action that these priests were violating his commands, they were not giving an accurate picture of his plan for a kingdom of priests.

How do you react to this story? Are you uncomfortable? Do you wish this story wasn't in the Scriptures? Does it violate your sense of the character of God? Would you like to go on to Leviticus 11:1-47, forget about it, and read something else? When the Scriptures challenge our view of God, we must respond by searching the rest of the Bible and thinking seriously about the issue. We must not ignore the challenge! God here is teaching us something important about himself and about ourselves. We must wrestle with the issue, praying for God's insight -- and God will honor that prayer.

We will consider why God acts this way -- but first, it is helpful to consider the image of the fire of God. What does the fire of the Lord signify? How is the image of God's fire used in Scripture? The Fire of the God The Scriptures use the image of fire to display God's holiness (see selected relevant Scriptures) <fireofgod.htm>. Recall that "holiness" literally means "set apart," and connotes God's purity. This central attribute of God's character is displayed in two different ways: God's essential holiness, and God's active holiness.

God reveals himself as a blazing fire on several occasions, showing his essential holiness. In Exodus 3:1-22, Moses sees a bush burning with fire, but not consumed. He begins to approach, but God says, "Do not come near." The fire is hot, burning, unapproachable. Similarly, in Exodus 19:1-25 God descends on Mt Sinai in smoke and fire. He calls Moses to himself, but warns the Israelites not to approach the mountain. Once again, God is displayed as unapproachable -- except on his terms, by his invitation. Consider also Ezekiel's vision of God in the first chapter of his prophetic writings. Fire and lightning are all around, and God himself appears to be dressed in fire.

These and similar images throughout the Bible portray God as holy, set apart, pure. Just as we cannot walk into fire, we cannot approach God without his invitation. We are impure, He is pure; we would be destroyed if we attempted to draw near to his holy fire on our own. God is essentially holy.

These images portray the holiness of God's nature, his essence. But God's essential holiness shines forth and affects the world at times -- his holiness becomes active. Scripture uses fire to portray this activity, God's work in the world.

Fire is a particularly appropriate image, because of the way that it interacts with other substances. If the substance is inflammable, fire consumes it. But if the substance is a valuable mineral like gold, fire consumes the impurities that are mixed with the gold, thereby purifying the base metal.

Just so, God's fire serves the purpose of exhibiting the worth of all items it touches. God's fire consumes everything that is worthless, and purifies those things that have worth. God's fire, then, shows his acceptance or his displeasure, depending upon the impact of the fire on the object in question.

We've already considered a case of God's fire denoting acceptance -- when the holy flame bursts from the tabernacle and consumes the offering, at the end of Leviticus 9:1-24. Similar events occur several times in the Old Testament; note especially the dedication of Solomon's temple, when God once again sends his own fire to consume the initial sacrifice. Remember also Elijah's great contest with the priests of Baal on Mt Carmel. Elijah proposes a contest: altars are built to Baal and the Lord -- and the people will acknowledge the one who answers by fire as the true God. Elijah even pours buckets of water over his altar to ensure that it can not spontaneously light from some hidden spark. But after Elijah prays that God would turn the hearts of the people, fire descends from heaven and consumes Elijah's offering.

These are all cases of God showing his acceptance through the sending of fire. Fire is also used to show his purification his people or destruction of his enemies. In Malachi 3:1-18, for example, the prophet writes:

2 For He is like a refiner's fire. . . . 3 And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.

God here is said to use fire to purify his priests so that they may, in turn, present acceptable offerings by fire to him. There is a close connection between God's acceptance of the offering and God's purification of the one presenting the offering. But fire both purifies and consumes, and God's fire is no different. God is said to be "a consuming fire" in both the Old Testament and the New. In Numbers 11:1-35, for example, when the Israelites begin to grumble and complain about God's treatment, "fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp." In 2 Kings 1:1-18, the king sends a contingent of soldiers to order Elijah to come before him. Elijah twice calls down fire from heaven to destroy the soldiers. God's fire therefore is a symbol of his judgment. But this consuming fire is not arbitrary. God's fire is a symbol of protection for His people. God displayed himself as a pillar of fire, remember, when Israel was caught between the Red Sea and the army of Egypt. These two ideas -- fire as protection and threat -- come together in a striking manner in Isaiah 30:27 Behold, the name of the LORD comes from a

remote place; Burning is His anger, and dense is His smoke; His lips are filled with indignation, And His tongue is like a consuming fire; 28 And His breath is like an overflowing torrent, Which reaches to the neck, To shake the nations back and forth in a sieve, And to put in the jaws of the peoples the bridle which leads to ruin. 29 You will have songs as in the night when you keep the festival; And gladness of heart as when one marches to the sound of the flute, To go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. 30 And the LORD will cause His voice of authority to be heard. And the descending of His arm to be seen in fierce anger, And in the flame of a consuming fire, In cloudburst, downpour, and hailstones.

Israel's enemies face this consuming, overwhelming fire; they are shaken back and forth. But God's people rejoice; they are protected from the ravaging of their enemies, and come to God's mountain, to God's presence with joyful music. So fire in Scripture is used to portray God's holiness. He is set apart. He is pure. And he is purifying and protecting his people through fire, even as he consumes his adversaries. The Judgment of God

Let us now return to Leviticus 10:1-20. Why did God choose this moment to send his fire in judgment? These priests were not God's adversaries; they were chosen specifically by him. Why did God take their lives?

First, note that there are similar cases elsewhere in the Bible: God kills Uzzah when he reaches out and touches the ark (2 Samuel 6:1-23). God kills Ananias and Sapphira when they lie about having given to the Lord all the proceeds from the sale of their land (Acts 5:1-42). On the other hand, there are many other times in the Bible when priests violate the Law, or Christians lie, cheat or steal, and they are not killed immediately. God uses Nadab, Abihu, Uzzah, Ananias, and Sapphira as examples: through their deaths, he teaches that he is holy, that he is serious, that we can only approach God according to his instructions, with an honest and clear conscience before him. By giving these dramatic, earthly consequences to a few humans, God shows that there will be dramatic, eternal consequences for all of his enemies, for all who foolishly try to approach him by any means other than the shed blood of Jesus.

God gives us an interesting detail in Leviticus 10:5 : Nadab and Abihu were taken outside the camp still dressed in their tunics. Recall that their tunics represent their righteous position before God. Through this detail, I believe God is saying that these two young men were not eternally condemned -- indeed, if all of us who have violated God's holiness were to be eternally condemned, most of us here this morning -- including myself -- would have no hope for eternal life. I believe we will join Nadab and Abihu at the marriage supper of the Lamb. But God punished them temporally to warn us about the eternal punishment that awaits those who spurn his offer of salvation.

Second, note that Nadab and Abihu violated God's holiness by approaching him in a manner different from what He had prescribed. God gave explicit instructions for the behavior of the priests. These two violated those instructions, knowingly. They tried to come before a holy God in their own way instead of God's way.

Remember that God ordained specific ways for the priests to approach him in order to project a particular image, to give a picture of the truths of his plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. When Nadab and Abihu approached in another way, they painted an incorrect picture, distorting

God's image. They thus disqualified themselves from the priesthood -- and God ended their lives.

What exactly did Nadab and Abihu do wrong? We don't know exactly. Leviticus 10:1 simply states that they offered "strange fire" before the Lord. Some believe that they started the fire in the wrong place. While this is not clear, I believe their error was in using for incense something other than God's prescribed substance. In Exodus 30:34-38 God gives explicit instructions for the mixing of his incense; this incense was not to be made by anyone else for any other purpose. In Exodus 30:9, God proscribes the offering of any "strange incense" on his altar. The proper incense has a very interesting quality: it has virtually no smell until it is burned. By itself it offers no pleasing fragrance, but when combined with fire, a rich, deep aroma fills the air.

What image is God projecting through this incense? Remember that incense represents our prayers (Psalms 141:2). I believe God is telling us here that it is only through the fire that we are purified; it is in the trials of life, when we become weak, that his power shows itself most fully.

You glorify God when you face trials in dependence on him and show by your reaction that you are different, that you have resurrection power, that the Holy Spirit lives in you. That's the central image that these two foolish priests distort.

If the incense has fragrance without the fire, the image could be interpreted as meaning that God wants us to have easy, happy lives. God wants to solve our problems, to give us even momentary pleasures. But God's central purpose is not to solve our problems. God's central purpose is to glorify himself through his people, to create for himself a people for his own dear possession, holy, blameless, spotless. And because of our innate sinfulness, because of our stubbornness, because of our hard hearts, we all need God's fire to purify us and cleanse us so that we can become more like Him.

James puts it this way:

2 Consider it pure joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:1-27)

Pure joy! Consider trials to be pure joy! Not because we enjoy the trial itself, but because we know that the trials give us the opportunity to grow, they give us the opportunity to display God's character in our lives. Do you realize that when you complain about your circumstances you are not only violating God's specific command -- you are calling God a liar? God shows us through his choice of incense that we must embrace the burning, we must embrace the trials, for it is in the burning that the fragrant aroma is given off!

Think one more time about Amy and Gary Ezzo. When her Dad began to yell, Amy could have felt, "Oh, why is my Dad doing this! Poor me! I don't deserve this rampage! God, why, oh, why do you allow my Dad to yell like this?" But she didn't. She turned the problem into an opportunity. His yelling provided her with a unique opportunity to show God's love to her father -- an opportunity she would never have had if he had not yelled at her.

You have that same opportunity. In every painful situation you face, in every clash of wills, in every unfair situation, in every discouragement, you can display God's character, showing how his life within you makes a difference -- or you can cop out. You can be the priest that God intends you to

be, sacrificing your right to hit back, yielding your rights -- or you can act just like any unredeemed person would act.

Let the fire burn so that you may give off God's pleasing aroma! For God did not choose you to give you a happy, easy life. He loves you too much to give you that. He chose you as his priest to know his love and to show it to those around you. And you cannot discover the depth of his love until you come to the end of your own resources; you will never know the power of his upholding arm until you have no power to hold yourself upright.

### Enduring to the End

Look again at Leviticus 10:1-20. In Leviticus 10:6-7, God gives specific instructions to Aaron and his two remaining sons which seem harsh to us. But through these instructions, God encourages us to endure to the end.

6 Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you may not die, and that He may not become wrathful against all the congregation. But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which the LORD has brought about. 7 You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, lest you die; for the LORD'S anointing oil is upon you." So they did according to the word of Moses.

Imagine the pain of Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar! Aaron's sons have just died right before him. The very day that should have been Aaron's finest, the day he finally assumed the role as high priest, he witnesses the death of his two dear sons. And now he has to offer incense before the Lord -- the same act that, improperly done, led to the death of Nadab and Abihu!

We can understand Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar if at this point they are thinking, "If this is what it means to serve God, I want out!" But Moses comes to them and says, in effect, "You're the only priests we've got -- the Lord's anointing oil is upon you. You are his chosen priests -- you have a sacred service. Don't quit. God uses you and equips you through the pain!"

Later in this chapter, God emphasizes once again their need to feed on the sacred bread, symbolizing their need to rest on God's power, God's sustenance, God's strength. Are you, like Aaron and his sons, about ready to quit?

Maybe you are in a difficult marriage -- your spouse is not a Christian, and you have tried to love him or her for years -- and you're tired. You have prayed and prayed, and seen some small changes, but then things just revert to they way they were before. You thought that God would save your spouse, you thought that your love would make a difference, but nothing has happened. You feel ready to quit, to give up.

Maybe you are out of work, or in what looks like a dead-end job, and you have prayed that God would use you where you are, and use these difficulties for his glory -- but you can't see how that has happened. You are just going through the motions, with no excitement, no sense of purpose, no sense of having a goal. You feel like God has let you down; you feel useless for God.

Maybe a loved one has rejected your counsel, and has run off to pursue a career choice, a partner, or a lifestyle that you know will end in pain and suffering. You prayed and prayed about this, you gave the best advice you could, you tried to act lovingly and wisely -- yet you had no

impact that you can discern, and all you can do is watch as this precious life moves ever closer to destruction. You wonder if you make any difference in anyone's life; you wonder if your ministry will ever show any impact.

I am here to tell you this morning: The anointing oil is upon you. If you are a Christian, you have a sacred task. God has called you to be part of his army, his team. You have a vital role to play on that team. You may never see the results of your ministry. But God's word to you is, "Be faithful! Lean on me, feed on me, draw strength from me, for my power is made perfect in your weakness." In this regard, consider Adoniram and Ann Judson. Adoniram was born in 1788; he learned to read at the ripe old age of 3, knew Latin and Greek at 10, and graduated as valedictorian from what became Brown University. He surely could have pursued a successful career in business or politics in the young Republic. But God called Adoniram to himself in a dramatic way, and he answered. With the help of the missionary society founded after the Haystack prayer meeting at Williams College, Adoniram investigated the prospects for overseas missionary service. He traveled to London to discuss the possibility of a joint venture with the London Missionary Society. While traveling, his ship was attacked and he was imprisoned. He could have quit then. But he didn't.

He came back to the US, met Ann, and was sure she was God's choice for his mate. He could have settled down to life in the US at that time. But he didn't.

Instead, God moved in Ann's heart to see her call to the mission field. She wrote:

"I have about come to the determination to give up all my comforts and enjoyments here, sacrifice my affection to relatives and friends, and go where God, in his providence, shall see fit to place me." She later wrote: "no female has, to my knowledge, ever left the shores of America to spend her life among the heathen; nor do I yet know, that I shall have a single female companion. But God is my witness, that I have not dared to decline the offer that has been made to me, though so many are ready to call it a 'wild and romantic undertaking.'" The day after Adoniram and Ann married, they sailed for the mission field.

After their arrival in Burma, the Judsons labored for six years -- without having a single convert. They could have quit then. But they didn't.

Even after nine years, there were only eighteen converts. They could have become discouraged and quit then. But they didn't. Their first child was stillborn; their second died in infancy. Adoniram and Ann could have quit then; but they didn't.

Burma and Britain fought each other in a war; since Adoniram spoke English he was suspected of working with the British, and was imprisoned for almost two years in horrible conditions. When he was finally freed, Ann and his third child were sick from the hardships they had endured; they both died a short while later. Adoniram could have quit then; but he didn't. He stayed 20 more years. And look at the fruit of that labor! After a quarter of a century of work in Burma, Adoniram finished his translation of the entire Bible into Burmese -- and this translation is still used today, 160 years hence. Late in his Burmese ministry, God provided the occasion to witness to one member of the Karen tribe, fulfilling an ancient prophecy given to this tribe. This man accepted the Lord -- and 25 years later, there were 12,000 Christians among the Karen. Today, about 30% of the Karen are Christians -- the highest proportion of any people groups in the region.

Adoniram Judson stayed the course. Late in his life he saw some of the fruit of his ministry, but God reserved most of the impact until after his death. Was this a great sacrifice for God? Adoniram Judson wouldn't have said so. He would have agreed with David Livingstone, who wrote:

People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paying back a small part of the great debt owing to our God, which we can never repay? Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind and a bright hope of glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege.

Livingstone also wrote:

Forbid that we should ever consider the holding of a commission from the King of Kings a sacrifice, so long as other men esteem the service of an earthly government as an honor. I am a missionary, heart and soul. God Himself had an only Son, and He was a missionary and a physician. A poor, poor imitation I am, or wish to be, but in this service I hope to live. In it I wish to die. I still prefer poverty and missions service to riches and ease. This is my choice.

Adoniram Judson provides a wonderful example of the importance of accepting the trials in our life as serving God's purposes, knowing that he will take those trials and use them for his glory. The danger in this example is that we might think this lesson only holds for those few who are called to foreign missions, or those called to full-time Christian service. But throughout our series on Leviticus we have emphasized that the priesthood is for all believers, that every one of us has a ministry -- and every one of us is called to embrace our trials, and to see God's character made complete in us. All of us need to be able to say with John Donne:

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
I, like an usurp'd town to'another due,  
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;  
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;  
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,

Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,

Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me. Or as Amy Carmichael puts it, less elegantly but just as profoundly:

If monotony tries me and I cannot stand drudgery,

if stupid people fret me and little ruffles set me on edge,

If I make much of the trifles of life,

then I know nothing of Calvary love.

Don't disqualify yourself as a priest. Let that fire of God burn all the impurities of your life. Accept the trials God sends into your life as opportunities to show God's character, and as opportunities to grow in your faith. Then endure to the end. That same fire that burns, that same fire that purifies, will protect you and, when necessary, avenge you. God has chosen you for the priesthood. What a calling! What a calling!

Let us pray:

Try us, Lord. Batter us, break us, knock us down. May we see you for what you are, and may you do to us whatever is necessary to get us to see you in your glory. May we, your priests, depend on your power to transform us into your likeness. May we serve you faithfully, enduring to the end, and may we then see you face to face in all your glory, together with all your saints. To Jesus be the glory forever and ever, Amen.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 10/11/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him. In particular, I follow Ray in interpreting the sin of Nadab and Abihu as offering improper incense. The Ann Judson and David Livingstone quotes come from some sermon notes of David Wallace <<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Ranch/8165/go.html>>.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## **01.11. Clean and Unclean (Lev\_11:1-47; Lev\_12:1-8; Lev\_13:1-59; Lev\_14:1-57; Lev\_15:1-33)**

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Clean and Unclean A sermon on Leviticus 11:1-47; Leviticus 12:1-8; Leviticus 13:1-59; Leviticus 14:1-57; Leviticus 15:1-33. Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, Nov. 29, 1998

It's a pleasure to be back at Community Bible Church after my long trip to Africa. I look forward to sharing with you many of the details of that trip in the weeks ahead.

Whenever I return after a long trip, I am treated to a series of performances at home. Over the course of nearly a month, all of my six children develop new skills or new games that they want to share. So, last Wednesday evening about 6:15, the four youngest boys were presenting a show. The make-up was particularly interesting. All had some black marks on their faces, but the boy playing the Wild Man was the most extreme: dressed only in underwear and a loincloth, the Wild Man was covered from waist to hair with black face crayon. About 6:30, suddenly realizing that we had only twenty minutes to prepare for the Thanksgiving Eve service, I announced, "The show has to end in one minute. We've got to clean up and leave for the church by 6:50!" The Wild Man looked at me and said, "Can't I go like this?"

Now, Community Bible Church has no dress code. Looking around this morning, I see some of us dressed in suits while others are dressed quite casually. But I think more than a few eyes would have turned had the Wild Man walked into church that evening.

Why did we tell the Wild Man to clean his face and arms and torso? Why shouldn't my sons come to church dressed in loincloths?

Certainly the appearance of such a creature would have distracted some of you, and we don't want to distract anyone's attention from the service itself. But preparing one's body and clothes for church is symbolic of the inner preparation that should go on prior to approaching God in worship. And all of us should be well-prepared in our hearts before coming to a worship service.

Consider these points as we turn our attention back to the book of Leviticus. For the last several months we have been making our way through this neglected book, this precious description of God's provision for meeting man's needs. We have seen that the first half of Leviticus describes God's plan for showering his people with his grace. Recall that on Mt Sinai the Israelites committed to keeping the law. "All that you have commanded, we shall do." Yet within a few days they had violated those very laws by bowing down before a golden calf.

God knew that they would never be able to keep the law, they could never become righteous through their perfect obedience. So God set up the sacrificial system to show symbolically how he would deal sin in the person of Jesus Christ some 1400 years later. But the sacrificial system deals with more than sin. As we have seen, the first 10 chapters of Leviticus detail God's provisions for dealing with all of our deepest needs. The five offerings show how God through

Jesus meets our need to belong, our need for acceptance, our need to respond, our need for peace, and our need for reconciliation with our fellow man in addition to our need for forgiveness from God. In the picture of the priesthood, God deals with our need for a priest, someone who will stand by us, to understand us, and help us to see God in the midst of this crazy world. That is what we have seen in the first 10 chapters. Chapters 11 to 15, which we will consider this morning, constitute a new section of the book. This section is particularly challenging for modern readers, because it focuses on the concepts of being clean and unclean. The adjective, noun, and verb forms of the Hebrew word translated "unclean" appear about 250 times in the Bible. More than one-third of those occurrences are in the five chapters we consider today. This morning, we will consider God's purpose in making these distinctions. We will see that the central concept here is preparation for entering God's presence. God is holy, he is essentially holy. In the immediate context -- Leviticus 9:1-24 and Leviticus 10:1-20 -- God has revealed himself to be like fire. At the end of chapter nine, fire shoots out from God's presence and consumes the offering, showing His acceptance. Then, in Leviticus 10:1-20, fire comes from the presence of the Lord and kills two of his selected priests, right after their ordination, because they did not obey his prescribed method for burning incense. God is like fire: unapproachable, devouring -- unless he grants us mercy.

Today's section follows immediately after these events. What can we do to prepare ourselves to come into such a presence? That is the central message of Leviticus 11:1-47; Leviticus 12:1-8; Leviticus 13:1-59; Leviticus 14:1-57; Leviticus 15:1-33. The theme of this section is found in Leviticus 11:44-45 : For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. 45 For I am the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; thus you shall be holy for I am holy. The importance of the Israelites being clean when they come into God's presence is detailed in Leviticus 15:31 :

Thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by their defiling My tabernacle that is among them.

God is holy, and had revealed himself as dwelling in his tabernacle. Entering the tabernacle symbolized approaching God's very presence.

Recall the story of Moses and the burning bush, found in Exodus 3:1-22. Moses sees a bush burning but not consumed by the flames. He draws near to examine it, but hears God's voice:

"Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)

God was telling Moses that His presence made the ground itself holy. God met Moses to reveal His plan for saving the people of Israel -- but Moses had to approach God on His terms. We cannot simply, lightheartedly traipse onto holy ground. We need to consider the holiness of God, the purity of God, and our own standing before him. Otherwise, we defile his holiness. Do you have holy ground in your house? In our house, a newly scrubbed kitchen floor is holy ground. Many times I have heard Beth say, "Do not come near here; remove your shoes from your feet, for I have just scrubbed the kitchen floor."

Actually, the idea in Exodus and Leviticus is similar: This place is clean. You, right now, are dirty. I may welcome you as a person, but I don't welcome your dirt. If you honor me, if you recognize my

purity, prepare yourself prior to coming into my presence. This is the general idea: the need to cleanse ourselves by God's standards prior to entering his presence.

One other element enters into these chapters that we should bring out before looking at some of the details. God wanted the Israelites to separate themselves from the Canaanites, not to mix up His prescribed forms of worship with the Canaanite methods of worship. Some of the restrictions on the Israelites that seem strange to us serve the purpose of ensuring that the Israelites do nothing that even resembles the abhorrent Canaanite religion. In these chapters God details how an Israelite becomes unclean -- and, when he is unclean, how to become clean once again. We will notice that some of the ways of becoming unclean involve disobedience, but others are unavoidable, simply the result of living in a fallen world.

### Forms of Uncleanness

Leviticus 11:1-47 describes clean and unclean foods. God details different categories of food, and labels them as clean or unclean. As an example, consider Leviticus 11:24-25. God has just listed categories of insects that are unclean; he concludes: By these, moreover, you will be made unclean: whoever touches their carcasses becomes unclean until evening, 25 and whoever picks up any of their carcasses shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.

Note the pattern: God distinguishes between the clean and the unclean, and describes what sort of contact leads to a person becoming unclean. In this case, a person is unclean not only if he eats the insect, but also if he so much as touches its carcass. Finally, God gives the remedy for uncleanness: the Israelite is to wash his clothes, wait until the beginning of the new day (remember, for the Israelites, as for Jews today, the new day begins at sunset), and then he will be clean. We see similar patterns throughout these chapters.

Leviticus 12:1-8 details how a woman is unclean after giving birth. Giving birth, clearly, is not sinful, nor does it occur by choice. It is a natural consequence of obeying God's command to be fruitful and multiply. Nevertheless, God says that the woman is unclean, is not ready to enter the tabernacle, immediately after birth. Turn now to Leviticus 12:6-7. She is to wait a specified number of days, and then:

6 'And when the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting, a one year old lamb for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. 7 'Then he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood.' This uncleanness seems to be more serious than that which results from touching a dead insect. Instead of simply waiting and washing, the woman must wait a lengthy period and then offer sacrifices to the Lord. Here shedding of blood is necessary to become clean. Recall that the burnt offering is a symbol of God's complete acceptance of us, while the sin offering is a symbol of the blood of Jesus cleansing us from all sins against God. Through engaging in these sacrifices, the woman is able to see that she is completely accepted by God, and that all her sins are forgiven.

Leviticus 15:1-33 is linked in some ways with Leviticus 12:1-8, so let's skip over Leviticus 13:1-59 and Leviticus 14:1-57 temporarily. Leviticus 15:1-33 describes how various bodily emissions lead to uncleanness. These emissions are in some cases the result of sickness, and in other cases the result of living a normal life. Some of us upon reading this chapter wonder why it's there, why God

put it in the Bible. This talk of seminal emissions and menstrual flows sometimes seems inappropriate. But the Bible is never prudish about discussing basic bodily functions; the Bible never sensationalizes or dwells on these functions, it never titillates, but in the appropriate context, they are all discussed. God created our bodies, he invented sexuality, and he declared it to be good. We may be uncomfortable talking about such matters, but God isn't. So look at Leviticus 15:2-3 :

Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. This, moreover, shall be his uncleanness in his discharge: it is his uncleanness whether his body allows its discharge to flow, or whether his body obstructs its discharge.' When a man with an illness produces a bodily discharge -- and this can be anything from an oozing sore to a runny nose to a diarrheal disease -- whatever he touches becomes unclean. Just so, as we find out later in the chapter, a woman with a disease that causes her to have a discharge, such as any of those we have mentioned or menstrual bleeding for a longer than normal period of time, is unclean. In both cases, once the disease ends, the cleansing is similar as for childbirth: wait for a period of time, wash, then offer both a burnt offering and sin offering.

If a man has a seminal emission, whether through normal sexual relations with his wife or as a result of a dream, or any other case, he is unclean. Here the result is more similar to touching a dead insect. He is to wash, and then wait until the evening when he will be clean. No sacrifice is necessary. This restriction, making normal sexual relations between husband and wife a source of uncleanness, may have been the result of God distinguishing the Israelite religion from the Canaanite religion. Canaanite worship included engaging in sexual relations with temple prostitutes. God here is putting a wall of separation between sex and tabernacle worship. Sexual relations with one's spouse are good, but sex is not part of one's worship of God. Not only is sex not performed in the tabernacle, but a man cannot come into the tabernacle directly after engaging in sexual relations. This provides a sharp contrast with the worship practices of all the surrounding tribes.

Leviticus 13:1-59 and Leviticus 14:1-57 deal with what is frequently translated "leprosy." The Hebrew term, however, is much broader than our English word. All sorts of skin diseases are included here, as well as "diseases" that infect clothing and houses (probably some form of fungus or mildew). The procedure for identification and cleansing is much more involved in this case. The leper cannot simply wait until evening, wash and be clean. Nor can he wait for a longer period of time, offer burnt and sin offering, and be clean. Leprosy is treated as a much more serious form of uncleanness.

Read with me Leviticus 13:2-3 :

2 When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons the priests. 3 And the priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean.

Note that if there is anything suspicious at all on the skin, the Israelite is to consult with a priest. And the priest is to examine the suspicious spot carefully. If it looks to be more than skin deep, if death is advancing as indicated by hair turning white, the priest doesn't pronounce judgment but isolates the person for seven days. The priest then reexamines the man to see if the disease has advanced. If leprosy is actually present, the disease is treated seriously, as described in Leviticus 13:45 :

45 As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' 46 He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. With the other forms of uncleanness, the unclean person is excluded from the tabernacle. With leprosy, the person is excluded not only from the tabernacle but from the entire camp. The leper must live outside the camp, and use symbols of mourning because of his exclusion from fellowship: he tears his clothes and goes about with his head uncovered.

Leviticus 14:1-57 describes an elaborate ritual for the cleansing of the leper. Note that this is not a procedure for curing the disease; this is not a medical textbook. Nothing is said about treatment for the disease. Leviticus 14:1-57, instead, deals with the cleansing of a leper who believes he is cured. In this case, the leper gets word to a priest to come outside the camp to inspect him. If the priest finds that the leprosy indeed is cured, then the leper follows a long process of cleansing. This process includes the sacrifice of a bird, sprinkling with blood, a seven day wait, and then the presentation of four offerings: the trespass offering, sin offering, burnt offering, and present offering (with an unusual ritual for the trespass offering -- we will discuss this ritual in some detail during the Sunday School hour.) Leviticus 14:1-57 also includes a somewhat similar ritual which is used for purifying unclean houses.

These are regulations for the Israelites, distinguishing between clean and unclean. While becoming unclean in and of itself was not a sin -- in the everyday course of events many would become unclean -- to enter the tabernacle while unclean was a serious sin. So God makes sure that all the Israelites know when they are unclean, and how they are to become clean again.

#### Uncleanness for Christians

What is the importance of this idea for us? What lessons for Christians today are included in Leviticus 11:1-47; Leviticus 12:1-8; Leviticus 13:1-59; Leviticus 14:1-57; Leviticus 15:1-33?

Recall that in our opening sermon on this topic we discussed our hermeneutic, our method of interpretation of Leviticus. We noted that interpreting Leviticus was more akin to interpreting Jesus' parables than interpreting a letter of Paul. When Jesus talks about a farmer sowing seed, he's not giving lessons for how to plant crops; he is giving spiritual lessons through the picture of the sower and the seed. So in Leviticus, we must ask ourselves: Are these statements pictures of New Testament truth? If so, we need to elucidate those truths. We also need to ask: Are the specific regulations and restrictions relevant for us today? Does the New Testament clarify this relevance?

Let us take the second question first. The specific restrictions are not relevant for us today. The very concept of clean and unclean helped the Israelites to know whether or not they were fit to enter the tabernacle. Tabernacle and temple worship is over; the New Testament makes clear that

those buildings were symbolic of God's presence.

Furthermore, ceremonial washing and dietary restrictions are addressed directly in the New Testament, where we are told that these regulations are no longer binding. So the importance of Leviticus 11:1-47; Leviticus 12:1-8; Leviticus 13:1-59; Leviticus 14:1-57; Leviticus 15:1-33 for us today is in the pictures these chapters provide for us of God's holiness, and the need for preparation prior to entering His presence. Let's look at some New Testament passages that clarify this. In Mark 7:1-37, the Pharisees are complaining that Jesus' disciples are not engaging in ceremonial washing prior to eating. Jesus responds:

18 Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) 20 And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23 All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

Jesus here says that the pictures of the unclean foods and the need for ceremonial washing were pictures of forms of defilement from within. The questions are not, what have you touched, or what food have you eaten? The question for us is, What is in your heart? What is inside you?

Look at Jesus' list again. I think it is easy for us to skim over it and to say, "Well, that doesn't apply to me. I don't engage in such behavior." But look again at what is included: Evil thoughts. Murder -- and Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that if we are angry with our brother we are guilty of murder. Fornication and adultery -- and Jesus says that he who lusts after a woman in his heart has committed adultery. Coveting. Envy. Pride. Deceitfulness -- such as telling small lies that make you look better. Slander -- such as telling an untruth about someone else, or telling a truth in a way that makes another person look bad. Can any of us honestly say that we lived this entire week without exhibiting in our thoughts at least one of these defilements?

These inner thoughts defile us. These inner thoughts make us impure. These sins make us unclean, and detestable to God. When we come to worship him full of such impure thoughts, we defile our house of worship, and show contempt for God himself. When we go through religious rituals of prayer, bible studies, or services of any type, and our hearts are full of such defilements, we show contempt for God. That is the meaning of clean and unclean.

"But hold it!" you might say, "Aren't we made righteous once and for all when we are saved? Aren't we covered by the blood of Jesus? Aren't we made clean forever?" To answer this question we need to distinguish between our salvation and our cleanness. This parallels the distinction between the leper's healing and his becoming clean. Recall that the leper could be healed of his disease, and he was still not ready to be admitted to the tabernacle.

Consider the interaction between Jesus and Peter in the upper room, the night of Jesus' arrest. Jesus is washing his disciples feet. He comes to Peter, who says:

8 "No, you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is

clean.

Now, when we teach on this passage, we frequently emphasize the last clause: our whole body is clean, meaning that we are saved. But Jesus is also saying we need to have our feet washed -- in our walk through this world we become defiled in many ways, some intentionally, some unintentionally; some defilements can be avoided, others cannot. There are times when we need to have our feet washed. It is important that we seek cleansing for those defilements -- and then we are prepared to enter God's presence.

Paul elaborates on this thought in 1 Corinthians 11:1-34. He is discussing the inappropriate attitude prevalent in Corinth towards the communion meal, and says:

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Paul's command is: Examine yourself! What is your attitude? How are you approaching this act of worship? Are you defiled? Are you suffering from selfishness? Are you filled with pride? Are you lustful? Judge yourself! If you don't, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:30, God may provide a temporal judgment by sending sickness, or even death. So don't be foolish -- seek cleansing! Then you can worship rightly!

Furthermore, then you can have complete confidence of your standing before God. Leviticus 11:1-47; Leviticus 12:1-8; Leviticus 13:1-59; Leviticus 14:1-57; Leviticus 15:1-33 tells the Israelites what is unacceptable, but also shows them how to become acceptable. Just so, Jesus tells us what defiles us, but also tells us how to be cleansed from those defilements.

Hebrews 10:22 reads like this: let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

We can draw near; we need to judge ourselves, we need to be cleansed by the washing of water with the word, as Paul puts it in Ephesians. This washing involves letting the word of God dwell richly in our lives, cleansing us, opening us up before him, laying bare before him our inadequacies and our defilements, our mistakes and our sins, our thoughts and our deeds. And God will cleanse us! We need never fear his rejection. This holy God, this pure and spotless being, this one in whom no darkness dwells, has determined that he will save to the uttermost all who come to Him through Christ -- and he will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So do you have a clear conscience? Are you sprinkled clean? Are you preparing yourself day by day by day, feeding on God's word, letting it wash you and cleanse you? Are you controlling your thoughts, so that you are dwelling on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy? Are you keeping short accounts with God, confessing your sins? This is the message of Leviticus 11:1-47; Leviticus 12:1-8; Leviticus 13:1-59; Leviticus 14:1-57; Leviticus 15:1-33 to us today. Steer clear of the defilements of the heart that so easily enter our lives. Seek God's cleansing forgiveness for those diseased emissions, those thoughtless words and cruel actions that we say

or do even unintentionally; clear your heart of the infectious diseases of pride and hate and bitterness that, if unattended, will isolate you from God and man, leaving you excluded from the camp, isolated in your suffering.

God is holy, but this holy God invites you into his presence -- on His terms. Won't you accept those terms?

Let us pray: Lord, we thank you for the message of this book -- a message that emphasizes both your holiness and your cleansing power. That you for the sacrifice of your son Jesus through whom we may approach you. May each of us examine our hearts and live in daily communion with you, reading and meditating on your word, seeking forgiveness for all sins, so that each of us might walk before you with a clear conscience. May we know your forgiveness, and have the confidence to approach you boldly, as your beloved children.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 11/29/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## 01.12. The Day of Atonement (Lev\_16:1-34)

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As Far as the East is From the West A sermon on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), Leviticus 16:1-34 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, Dec. 6, 1998

Yesterday morning while Beth and I were still in bed, we heard the pitter-patter of little feet walking down the hallway. We looked up, and saw three-year-old Joel's smiling face peering in at the door. He crawled under the covers with us and -- to our surprise -- began a very profound conversation. As you know, our dear friend Mrs Gert died at the age of 95 a few weeks ago. After hearing of her death and her entry into a new life with the Lord, Joel has been asking a lot of questions. So yesterday we discussed God's love for us and his desire for us to be like him. We talked about the barrier separating us from God, our sinfulness -- "All of us do bad things," we said. "When we do bad things, we deserve punishment. But God loves us so much that he sent his dear son Jesus to take our punishment by dying on the cross. God is holy, he is perfect, he never does anything bad." At this point, Joel broke in, speaking with wide open eyes and great sincerity: "I will never, ever do anything bad again." Have you made a similar statement? My guess is that most of us here this morning have made such a promise to God. We see our own sinfulness, we get a glimpse of God's perfect holiness, we are overcome with a sense of His love -- and we despise our sin. We sense the freedom of His love, and cry out, "I will never, ever sin again!" We are like the Israelites at Mt Sinai, so impressed by God's presence among them, promising "All you have commanded we will do!" The desire for purity, for sinlessness, is good. But what happens when you fail? What happens when you next sin?

None of us can live up to Joel's commitment. We may make that statement in all sincerity, but every one among us who has made that commitment has since violated it.

We come this morning to Leviticus 16:1-34, the concluding chapter of the first of the two major divisions of this book. As we have seen, in this first division God paints a series of pictures, showing how through the person and work of Jesus Christ He provides the answer for our every weakness. Through the five offerings, God shows how he fulfills our need for belonging, our need to respond, our need for forgiveness, and our need for reconciliation. Through the priesthood God shows how each of us needs the great high priest, Jesus Christ, to serve as our mediator -- and he shows how he has given a priestly ministry to each one of us, as God displays his love for his people through his people. Last week <levitfestival.htm> we saw how God provides for our need for cleansing, alerting us to the filth that we collect either intentionally or unintentionally while living in this fallen world, and providing ways for cleansing, so that we can enter his presence in complete confidence.

Today's passage, Leviticus 16:1-34, concludes this section with the most detailed picture yet of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Here God sums up the primary provision he has made for reconciling His people to himself. And here God provides the answer we need when we, like Joel, fail to live up to our sincere intention to avoid sin. And as we will see, God not only reconciles us to himself, but he provides a beautiful picture of our being completely separated from our sins.

During the rest of our time together, we will examine The Sacrifice, The Scapegoat, and the Impact on the People. Let's begin by looking at the Sacrifice. The Sacrifice

1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the LORD and died. 2 And the LORD said to Moses, "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. 3 Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. 4 He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and the linen undergarments shall be next to his body, and he shall be girded with the linen sash, and attired with the linen turban (these are holy garments). Then he shall bathe his body in water and put them on. On the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, Aaron the High Priest acts out Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, the sacrifice that allows God to satisfy his justice while showing love to his people. Joel was impressed yesterday with God's purity -- and here God shows his purity by prohibiting any casual entrance into the Holy of Holies.

Remember, in the tabernacle (and later the temple) the ark of the covenant -- containing the tablets of the 10 commandments -- was placed in an interior room. On top of the ark were two gold cherubim, whose wings spread out over the ark. The top of the ark was called the "mercy seat," the place where atonement would be made for the people. So the ark and the mercy seat represent both God's Law -- His requirements for holiness -- and God's mercy, his forgiving love for his people.

Recall also that this interior room, called the Holy of Holies or the Holiest Place, was separated from the outer room by a curtain, an opaque veil. And note that no one could enter through that veil, except the High Priest -- and he only this one time each year, when he acts out Jesus' sacrifice for us.

How is the high priest dressed when he acts out Jesus' sacrifice? He is not wearing the normal priestly garments, which we described in detail in an earlier sermon <levitpriest2.htm>. These normal garments included gold and precious stones -- they were festive, in a sense, brightly colored. Those celebratory garments are appropriate when the high priest pictures the risen Christ, but on this special day he is acting out Jesus death. So on this day the high priest wears nothing except the linen tunic and undergarments, representing the inner righteousness of Christ. Jesus on the cross wore no clothes at all -- he was clothed only in his own righteousness. Just so, the high priest on this day removes his festive garments and is dressed only in the righteousness of Jesus.

Let's continue reading:

5 "And he shall take from the congregation of the sons of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. 6 "Then Aaron shall offer the bull for the sin offering which is for himself, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household. 7 "And he shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 8 "And Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. 9 "Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the LORD fell, and make it a sin offering. 10 "But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make

atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat.

Jesus enters directly into the inner sanctuary, based on his own righteousness. Unlike Jesus, Aaron is sinful. Only the perfect can enter into the Holy of Holies. So before he can act out the role of Jesus for the people, Aaron must cover his own sins. We won't discuss this morning the method God prescribes for Aaron to cover his sin; I encourage you to read it on your own. But in acting out the role of Jesus, God tells Aaron to work with two goats. These two goats will foreshadow two distinct elements of the work of Jesus on the cross. Note that these goats come "from the congregation" -- they belong to the congregation as a whole rather than to any individual. He presents both of these goats before the Lord, and lets the Lord decide by lot which is to be sacrificed, and which is to become the scapegoat.

Let's continue reading in Leviticus 16:15, after Aaron has sacrificed the bull for his own sins:

15 "Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. 16 "And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel, and because of their transgressions, in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities. 17 "When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel. 18 "Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar on all sides. 19 "And with his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times, and cleanse it, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate it. So Aaron places the blood of the sin offering for the people on the mercy seat. And the sins are covered! The people of Israel are not holy, they are not always clean, they violate their promise never, ever to do bad things again -- and this makes the tent of meeting itself unclean. Yet God provides the perfect sacrifice through the person of Jesus Christ; Jesus enters into God's presence with his own blood, puts that blood on God's mercy seat, and atones for all sin.

Recall that no one can see Aaron doing this -- this action takes place behind the opaque veil. But after performing the ritual in the Holy of Holies, Aaron comes outside to the altar where all can see, and puts the goat's blood high up on the horns of the altar. Now the entire congregation witnesses the covering. The blood covers their sin.

Thus, the blood has been brought into the very presence of God. The requirements of the law, as represented by the tablets of the 10 commandments, are satisfied. The people and the tabernacle itself are covered through this atonement. We are forgiven by the blood of Jesus. The Scapegoat This sacrifice, while different and more detailed than the usual sin offerings, nevertheless is similar to that daily ritual. The next act on the Day of Atonement, however, is unusual, and a bit strange. Let's continue reading in Leviticus 16:20 :

20 "When he finishes atoning for the holy place, and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat. 21 "Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by

the hand of a man who stands in readiness. 22 "And the goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

What is going on here? Aren't the people's sins already forgiven? Aaron has sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, before the Lord's very presence -- how can he then place the people's sins on this goat? Why does God prescribe this second ritual?

Both goats represent the work of Jesus. This goat whose blood is sprinkled on the mercy seat represents Jesus' taking on our punishment, dying for us, satisfying God's justice. But remember, all that takes place where the people cannot see. Sin not only separates us from God -- sin also makes us feel defiled, sin leads to a guilty conscience. We promise God we will never, ever sin again -- then we do. And we feel so impure, we feel unworthy of God's love, we feel like we can't even read the bible or bow down in prayer. So God provides this second picture, for all to see, of His separating us from our sin.

Jewish tradition says that the man appointed to drive off the goat would walk out of the camp, with the whole congregation watching. He would continue walking a distance of 12 miles -- disappearing from the sight of the congregation, walking far beyond what anyone could see. Then he was to drive off the goat, and continue watching until he himself could see it no longer. The sins of the people are no more. They disappear into the wilderness.

You see why that is important? Have you ever done something to hurt your best friend -- perhaps your spouse, or your sibling? You ask for forgiveness, and they claim to forgive you -- but then, months later, in the midst of an argument, they drag up that old hurt, and throw it back in your face. "You always hurt me! Remember when . . ."

Through this picture God shows us that he will never act that way. Our sins are forgiven -- not only temporarily, not only until our next disagreement. The blood of Jesus has covered those sins for all time. Satan will try to make us feel guilty, Satan will try to make us feel separated from God -- but that goat carried our sins off into the wilderness, never to be seen again.

Note how God clarifies that this atonement is complete: Aaron confesses all their iniquities, and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins. Nothing is left out. There is no more worry -- the blood of Jesus covers it all.

God puts it this way in Isaiah 43:25 :

I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

Charles Spurgeon expresses this thought beautifully in his sermon on this passage <<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0095.htm>>:

We may have to take a long journey, and carry our sins with us; but oh! how we watch and watch till they are utterly cast into the depths of the wilderness of forgetfulness, where they shall never be found any more against us for ever.

"The wilderness of forgetfulness." The scapegoat takes our sins to the wilderness of forgetfulness. God will never throw these sins back in our faces. Satan will try to do so, but we can throw those

accusations back at him, remembering this image of the scapegoat carrying our sins to where they will be found no more. The Psalmist says: For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:11-12 NASB) So God, in the picture of the scapegoat, meets our need for a clear conscience. He removes our sin, sending it far away where it can never be found; God promises he will never, ever hold those sins against us. And God keeps his promises. Praise Him!

Consider now Leviticus 16:23-24 :

23 "Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting, and take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there. 24 "And he shall bathe his body with water in a holy place and put on his clothes, and come forth and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people.

Aaron removes his special clothes, the clothes he wears when acting out the death of Christ, then bathes, and puts on his normal clothes, which represent the risen Christ. He subsequently offers the whole burnt offering. Remember that this particular offering represents God's complete acceptance of us, our being dedicated in our entirety to Him. What a beautiful picture of God's acceptance of his people. So we have now considered the Sacrifice and the Scapegoat. Let's conclude by examining the impact on the people.

Impact on the People.

29 "And this shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls, and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you; 30 for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you shall be clean from all your sins before the LORD. 31 "It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute. The people are completely humbled by this ritual. They are guilty -- there is no question about that. They can do nothing to make themselves righteous in God's sight. They cannot even think of entering the presence of a Holy God. They have promised to live holy and righteous lives, but they have failed. Their only hope is in God's mercy.

Note how they are to do no work. This is not simply a ritualistic requirement. There is no work we can do that will put us right with God. There is nothing we can do to earn God's favor. His favor is given to us solely on His terms, and those terms are solely by the blood of Jesus. So what can we do but humble ourselves, bow before him, praise him, and thank him for his mercy and grace?

Conclusion Have you been like Joel -- impressed with God's love, overwhelmed by his lovingkindness, vowing in consequence never to sin again, vowing to live henceforth a life worthy of his calling? And have you stumbled and failed, have you fallen into sins that embarrass you and prove you to be a liar? The Day of Atonement is for you. Don't let Satan use your failures to drive you away from God, in supposed humility. No! God never demands that you make yourself perfect -- instead, He has guaranteed that He will make you perfect. If you have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, the blood of Jesus covers the mercy seat for you, and God wants you to fall at His feet, confessing your sin, so that He might welcome you into His sanctuary -- right behind the veil, into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of the all-powerful, perfectly holy, perfectly just,

all-loving God.

There is nothing you can do to earn God's favor. God's covenant with you is based on grace, and grace alone. So delight in that grace, and believe God when he says he will remember your sins no more! This idea is expressed beautifully in the novel *The Cross* by Nobel-prize winning author Sigrid Undset. The main character, Kristin, gives away her wedding ring when she knows she is about to die, and notes that the letter M -- for Mary -- is impressed upon her bare skin. And the last clear thought that formed in her brain was that she should die ere this mark had time to vanish -- and she was glad. It seemed to her to be a mystery that she could not fathom, but which she knew most surely none the less, that God had held her fast in a covenant made for her without her knowledge by a love poured out upon her richly -- and in despite of her self-will, . . . somewhat of this love had become part of her, had wrought in her like sunlight in the earth, had brought forth increase which not even the hottest flames of fleshly love nor its wildest bursts of wrath could lay waste wholly. A handmaiden of God had she been -- a wayward, unruly servant, oftenest an eye-servant in her prayers and faithless in her heart, slothful and neglectful, impatient under correction, but little constant in her deeds -- yet had he held her fast in his service, and under the glittering golden ring a mark had been set secretly upon her, showing that she was His handmaid, owned by the Lord and King who was now coming . . . to give her freedom and salvation -- My friends, does the description of Kristin fit you? I find it so accurate in describing me. Wayward. Unruly. Slothful. Neglectful. Impatient. Inconstant. Unworthy of God's love and care. Is that you? If so, God's message for you today is that if you have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, God is holding you fast in his covenant, God is pouring out his love upon you richly, God has marked you as his, you are His bride, his handmaiden, owned by the Lord and King who is coming to give you freedom and salvation.

There is nothing in all creation that can separate you from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord -- not your failures, not your negligence, not your sins. Remember that goat, running off into the desert, never to be seen again, carrying your sins as far away as the east is from the west. Remember God's love, holding you fast despite yourself. Remember -- and fall on your face before him. Praise God!

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 12/6/98. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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## **01.13. Me? Obey the Law? (Lev\_17:1-16; Lev\_18:1-30; Lev\_19:1-37; Lev\_20:1-27)**

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Me? Obey the Law? A Sermon on Leviticus 17:1-16; Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 19:1-37; Leviticus 20:1-27 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, Jan. 10, 1999 Let's begin the new year with a quiz. Answer True or False:

Question 1: A Christian is someone who gives ten percent of his income to the Lord, goes to church every Sunday, reads the Bible every day, and does not smoke, drink, or use foul language.

Perhaps the answer to that question is too obvious. Try this one:

Question 2: A Christian is someone who has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Christians gives ten percent of their income to the Lord, go to church every Sunday, read the Bible every day, and do not smoke, drink, or use foul language.

What is the role of rules in the Christian life? Or more formally: What is the role of law in the Christian life? Most of us here this morning know that we are not put right with God by our obedience to some legal code. We know that there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation, that salvation is a free gift of God offered to all those who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Most of us know that even our faith is a gift of God. But once we are saved -- do we need to obey a set of rules? Does God want us to live up to a list of do's and don'ts? Our studies in Leviticus have brought us to Leviticus 17:1-16. This is a turning point in the book. The first 16 chapters describe God's gracious provisions for dealing with the failures of the Israelites to live up to the commandments. Remember that the Israelites had told God, "All you have commanded we will do!" Yet within hours they broke God's commands. But God in his grace provided through the sacrificial system a method of restoring their relationship to Him, a way of meeting all the needs that they, as humans, experience in this fallen world. The sacrificial system, the priesthood, the distinction between clean and unclean, and the day of atonement all prefigure the work of Jesus in this world. We find in Jesus the answer to all our failures, all our faults, all our defilement. But God is doing more than meeting our needs. There is an underlying purpose to God's plan of salvation. Remember at Sinai God told the Israelites that they would become his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. God is in the process of creating for himself the perfect bride, a people for his own dear possession, a people cleansed of all impurities: Man restored to his rightful place as God's companion. God is creating a people who can have this type of relationship to Himself. The last half of the book of Leviticus answers this question: If we are in this type of relationship with God, how should we then live? How should we behave? If I am part of God's holy nation, how should I live?

God gives the fundamental answer to that question several times in the section we consider today, Leviticus 17:1-16; Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 19:1-37; Leviticus 20:1-27 : "Be holy, for I am holy." The citizens of a holy nation, the bride of a holy God, must be holy themselves -- or they do not belong in that nation. So we might rephrase the question: How can I be holy?

Now, in the four chapters we are considering this morning, we find many rules and regulations. God is helping the Israelites to know how to behave as a holy nation. He chooses to provide this help in part by telling the Israelites things they should and should not do.

What about us? Do Christians have to live out a particular type of life? Do Christians have to live up to a set of rules? Or, saved by grace and depending on God's forgiveness, can we live any way that we choose, knowing that He will forgive us? Specifically, do the commands given to the Israelites in this latter half of Leviticus have any relevance for us today?

These questions are especially important for each of us in our personal lives. In addition, our interpretation of this section is central to several issues facing the church as a whole today. For example, a number of churches have adopted what they call "open and affirming" positions towards homosexuality. Now, Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 20:1-27 contain explicit prohibitions of homosexual behavior. So are "open and affirming" congregations rejecting the clear teaching of Scripture? The answer is not as clear as it appears at first glance, for these chapters also include commands that seem off the wall. For example: "Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material (Leviticus 19:19)." Those who do not believe homosexual behavior is a sin ask the logical question: How can you condemn homosexual behavior while wearing a blended polyester and wool blazer?

We will spend two Sundays looking at this important issue. This morning we will first examine God's underlying purpose for providing any law at all. This is the rationale for the law. Second, Christians are frequently unclear about the relevance of any law for us today. So we will next look at several New Testament passages to gain an understanding of the New Testament approach to law. At that point, we will be prepared to return to Leviticus. We'll do this next week, when we will delineate the types of law found in this section. Along the way we will see that God's law grows out of his very nature -- the central features of the law are not arbitrary decisions God made, but result from Who God is. We cannot claim to be Christians and live according to our natural desires. Yet a legalistic approach to living the Christian life is deadly, contrary to the essence of our relationship to God. The Rationale for Law So first let's look at the rationale for law. The break in Leviticus between chapters 1-16 and chapters 17-27 is similar to the break in Ephesians between chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. Remember, in the first half of Ephesians Paul details the nature of our calling, telling us of all the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. Then at the beginning of chapter 4 he tells us that we must walk in a manner worthy of that high calling.

Here in Leviticus as in Ephesians, the rules and regulations are presented not as a way to gain God's favor, but as a logical result of the nature of God, and the nature of our relationship to him. In each case, God first shows his great provisions for us, and the type of relationship he desires with us; only then does he give us rules to govern our behavior. Christian behavior results from a relationship with God; it is not a prerequisite to that relationship. Only God's transforming power can enable us to live lives worthy of His calling.

Some of you may recall a story I used to illustrate this point when we first started studying Ephesians almost two years ago. Picture an American standing outside Buckingham Palace. Let's call him Jerry. Jerry is dressed as your typical tourist: baggy shorts, sunglasses, a baseball cap, and a T-shirt. He's snapping pictures of the changing of the guard. Suddenly, much to Jerry's surprise, one of these big, gruff guards, approaches him. The imposing guard, his head topped off

with a huge black felt hat, says, "Come with me!"

"What have I done?" asks Jerry. "Really, if I wasn't supposed to take pictures you can have the camera!" The guard refuses the camera and says, "The Queen has chosen you! You are to sit with the royal family!"

"But look my clothes! A Red Sox cap and a dirty Williams T-shirt! And how do I act at a royal dinner?"

"The Queen will provide you with fresh clothes, instructions in protocol, and -- thankfully -- a bath. Oh, and one more item: The Queen has decided that you are to be a joint heir with the Prince of Wales!"

"An heir! To the British crown? But my ancestors rebelled against the English monarchy!"

How will Jerry behave? What will he do, now that he is second in line to the British crown? If Jerry's position is secure, if the Queen's elevating of his position is irrevocable, then no matter how he acts he will maintain his position. His position does not depend on his behavior. But if Jerry takes to heart the gracious act of the Queen, if he truly understands the honor that she has conferred on him, if he knows his own unworthiness, then he will do his best to live a life worthy of this calling. He will learn all he can from the steward assigned to him; he will discard his Williams T-shirt and wear the clothes given to him; he will live his entire life praising the monarch for her grace to him, and living up to her standards.

Jerry does not have to live up to any set of rules to maintain his position as Prince. But he will be quite foolish and ungrateful to live in any way that he pleases. The position of the Israelites here in Leviticus is quite similar to Jerry's. Why did God choose the people of Israel as his? Not because there was anything special about them. Not because He knew they would be especially responsive. He chose them simply because he chose them. But he displayed his grace to them in order that they might become his own treasured possession, a people who would be devoted to him. To use New Testament terminology, God was beginning the process of creating a perfect bride for Christ.

God's choice was not dependent on their behavior. But behavior is a logical consequence of God's choice.

See how God lays this out clearly in Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 19:1-37; Leviticus 20:1-27. I want to read several selections to you. Notice the emphasis again and again on the phrases, "I am the LORD your God," and "Be holy for I am holy." Remember that the word "LORD" when printed with all caps is a substitute for the name of God in the Hebrew text. English translations have used this convention because the Jewish rabbis felt it was disrespectful to pronounce the name of God. But this morning I want to insert God's name into the text instead of the word "LORD" -- I believe that brings out more clearly the personal connection between the people and their God, the God of their covenant. So I will read "Yahweh" for each occurrence of the word "LORD" in your text.

18: 1 Yahweh said to Moses,

2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am Yahweh your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I

am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am Yahweh your God. 5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am Yahweh.

6 "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am Yahweh. (God then gives a long series of restrictions on sexual relations.)

30 Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am Yahweh your God."

19:1 Yahweh said to Moses,

2 "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, Yahweh your God, am holy. 3 "Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am Yahweh your God. 4 "Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am Yahweh your God.

9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am Yahweh your God.

18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am Yahweh.

28 "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am Yahweh.

30 "Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am Yahweh.

31 "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am Yahweh your God.

32 "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am Yahweh.

34 The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.

35 "Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. 36 Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of Egypt.

37 "Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am Yahweh."

20:7 "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am Yahweh your God. 8 Keep my decrees and follow them. I am Yahweh, who makes you holy. 26 You are to be holy to me because I, Yahweh, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

You see how clearly God shows that these behavioral regulations grow out of the Israelites' relationship to him? Again and again and again, God says "I am Yahweh your God." The relationship exists. And because the Israelites are so closely linked to this holy God, they

themselves must be holy.

What does God mean when he says, "I, Yahweh, am holy"? God's holiness implies that he cannot tolerate evil. As Habakkuk states, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong (Habakkuk 1:13)." God is light in his very nature; in Him is no darkness at all. God does not choose to hate evil; He must hate evil, or he would not be God. Consider these verses:

"I, Yahweh, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity" (Isaiah 61:8).

"Do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all these," declares Yahweh (Zechariah 8:17).

"I hate divorce," says Yahweh the God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence." (Malachi 2:16).

You see, God hates evil from his inmost being. His nature is repelled by evil. If we are to be his own, treasured possession, He must cleanse us from the evil that is in our nature. If we are to belong to Him, we must be holy, for he is holy. For this reason, those who are in covenant relationship to the Lord must love His law. If we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and might, we must love His law -- because the Law reveals his character! So the Psalmist writes:

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. (Psalms 119:97)

Now, many Israelites misunderstood the law, thinking that by obeying the commandments outwardly and going through the motions of the sacrificial system they earned the right to God's favor. But God rebukes the Israelites for such a conception many times in the prophetic books. So we might summarize the Old Testament view of the law in this way: The law is not a set of arbitrary hoops God sets up for people to jump through in order to gain access to His presence. Rather, the law reveals God's character, showing us how God's chosen people should respond to the love God has showered upon them. The law presumes an intimate relationship with God -- it is not a way of earning that intimate relationship. A New Testament View of the Law

What is the New Testament view of the Law? The New Testament view of the Law is fundamentally the same as the Old Testament view. Salvation is by God's grace alone; we do not earn it in any way. No one becomes righteous by obeying the Law. We are God's people by His grace. But because God is transforming his people into a perfect bride, we must love His law and obey Him, by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Let us look briefly at four New Testament passages that clarify these concepts.

First, Jesus himself makes clear that the law was not a temporary phenomenon, relevant only to the Israelites. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says: 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. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-19) The Law must continue, for the Law reveals God's

character. Jesus fulfills the Law -- he lives up to its every precept, and his death on the cross fulfills the righteous requirements of the Law for all who believe.

Jesus then goes on to say that our righteousness must surpass the external obedience of the scribes and Pharisees -- and then he shows what this means. We must attune ourselves to God's character, becoming like Him. For our second passage, turn to John 14:1-31. In these last words to his disciples, Jesus once again speaks of the role of Law in our lives. But note how he grounds the discussion of obedience not only in the relationship we have with him, but also his very presence within us.

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." . . .

23 "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. (John 14:18-21; John 14:23-24 a)

You see how this reinforces the Old Testament teaching? Jesus says, "You are Mine; you are in relationship to me. I am going away, but I will come to you and make my home with you -- and then you will have true life! You are in me, I am in you -- and so you must be like me, you must take on my character. You become like me by obeying my commands -- for these commands reveal my character."

Jesus is not here setting up a list of rules for Christians to obey. Jesus wants our obedience to the Law because he is transforming us into his likeness -- we are becoming like him. Since the Law reveals God's character, we must live in accord with the Law. A statement Jesus made a few days earlier gives us further insight into the reason why love implies obedience. Turn to Matthew 22:1-46; let's read beginning in Matthew 22:35 :

35 An expert in the law tested [Jesus] with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:35-40)

How can Jesus say that all the Law hangs on these commandments? Because the Law reveals God's character, and God is love! God loves your neighbor -- how can you claim to be God's precious possession, how can you claim that the Holy Spirit dwells in you and hate your neighbor?

Once again, the Law was not set up as a method of becoming right with God. Living by the Law is the consequence of your relationship with God. (Note here that the second greatest commandment is a quote from Leviticus 19:1-37). For our final New Testament passage, let us turn to Galatians 5:1-26. Recall that the entire book of Galatians deals with the Law. Some Jewish Christians had gone to Galatia after Paul and told the Gentile believers that they must become

Jews, undergo circumcision, and obey all the laws or they would not be saved. Paul responds that this is a false gospel, indeed, no gospel at all -- because it reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of law in our relationship to God. After four chapters of emphasizing the freedom we have in Christ, showing how we are saved by grace and grace alone, Paul turns back to the correct role of law in Galatians 5:1-26. Let's begin reading in Galatians 5:13 :

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another in love. 14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. . . .

6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. So in Christ we are free; our position before God does not depend on our obedience. Think again of Jerry. If the Queen's proclamation is irreversible, Jerry could have bad table manners and make silly faces during solemn occasions and generally act like a jerk, but he would still be second in line the British crown. Our position is secure. Our salvation does not depend on our obedience. We really are free. But our freedom in Christ does not imply that we have the license to act like animals! God saved us for a purpose, and that purpose is to glorify himself, creating for himself a perfect bride.

Furthermore, as Paul makes clear, we have an indwelling presence! God's Spirit is in us, producing precious fruit, truly transforming us so that our character is becoming like God's character. Our job is to keep in step with the Spirit, to allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit, to live our lives in conscious dependence on Him so that we might become like Him. And if we do that, then we don't have to worry about obeying the Law. Did you catch that in this passage? The end of Galatians 5:22 : "Against [the fruit of the Spirit] there is no law." If we are keeping in step with the Spirit so that His fruit is characterizing our lives, then our character is becoming like God's character -- and we are thus fulfilling the Law.

This, by the way, is the last step in the consummation of Jesus' statement that he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. The Law is fulfilled when God's people have fully taken on God's character. We do this when the Spirit completes His work within us. So the New Testament view of the Law reflects the Old Testament view -- but takes it a step further. In the Old Testament, it is clear that God's people should live up to his revealed character -- but it is not clear how they are to accomplish that. After Jesus' death on the cross and the coming of the Holy Spirit, we have the privilege of becoming the temple of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit lives within us, empowering us to live lives worthy of His calling. So our call is to become like God, not through our own efforts, but through dependence on the power at work within us. We do this not primarily by trying to avoid evil, but by a positive morality -- developing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. If our lives are characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, then we are fulfilling the Law indeed.

### Conclusion

Next week we will return to Leviticus 17:1-16; Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 19:1-37; Leviticus 20:1-27 and see how to make sense of the specific laws that God gives in those great chapters. We will see that in order to make sense of those chapters we need to differentiate between four purposes of the laws given: To reveal God's character, to picture God's plan of salvation, to ensure the Israelites avoid idolatry, and to set up a system of legal punishment for theocratic Israel. So some of those laws are fulfilled in Jesus' sacrifice, and, while the underlying purposes of all these laws hold today, the specifics of some are no longer relevant. We will see that next week. But for today, consider the true nature of the Law. So many people, even many Christians, view the Law as a set of rules which they have to live up to. They think of the Law as a set of lines -- and think, "If I cross that line, I sin. I won't cross the line -- but I'll get as close to the line as I can!" That is not a Christian approach to the Law. Let's call that approach to morality "linism." If that is your approach, then you are repugnant to God. I know that is a strong statement, but consider: "linism" was the approach of the Pharisees -- and consider the harsh denunciations they received from Jesus. And the Pharisees even drew the lines far from God's proscribed behavior!

No. "Linism" is not Christianity. A Christian is not someone who avoids doing a certain set of behaviors. Avoiding certain behaviors is not the key to living the Christian life.

Fundamentally, this issue gets back to the very meaning of salvation. Do you understand what salvation means? Do you understand what God is doing through this eternal plan of salvation? God doesn't stop with bearing the punishment for our sin, freeing us from the punishment we deserve. God doesn't stop there. God raises us up and seats us with Christ in the heavenlies. God is making us into Christ's perfect bride -- holy, blameless, without spot or wrinkle. God will present you and me, the church, to Christ as his long-sought bride -- and we will be perfect: clothed in white, sparkingly beautiful, perfect in every respect.

God is glorifying himself by taking the mess that we have made of ourselves, the mess we have made of this fallen world, and transforming all of us together into the perfect bride of Christ.

God has determined that we will be like him -- and the Law reveals his very character. So keep in step with the Spirit! Don't be content with living up to some set of rules -- become like God! Be transformed into His likeness! This is your calling!

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 1/10/99. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## 01.14. Christians and the Law (Lev\_17:1-16; Lev\_18:1-30; Lev\_19:1-37; Lev\_20:1-27)

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Christians and the Law A Sermon on Leviticus 17:1-16; Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 19:1-37; Leviticus 20:1-27 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, Mark 01267 What are the characteristics of an ideal family? Is an ideal family one in which the parents lay out a set of rules and the children obey them?

Get up at 7!

Make your bed!

Keep your room neat!

Don't fight!

Say "Please" and "Thank You."

Suppose that I made a set of rules for my six children and achieved 99% compliance. That would be a miracle -- but would that necessarily make mine an ideal family?

No. Every family must have rules, but obedience to rules is not the essence of an ideal family. Love is the essence of an ideal family.

In an ideal family, the parents love and cherish the children and have the children's best interests at heart. (Note: the children's best interest does not mean the children's pleasure.)

In an ideal family, the parents love and respect each other.

In an ideal family, the children love and honor their parents, trusting in their wisdom,

In an ideal family, the children love each other, enjoy each other's presence, and build each other up.

THOSE are the characteristics of an ideal family: Love. Respect. Honor.

Now, in this ideal family, will the children obey their parents? Yes! But their obedience RESULTS FROM their love and respect -- it results from the love-relationship between parent and child. Because the children know their parents' love, they trust them and love them, so they obey -- even when they don't understand exactly why a particular rule is made. Furthermore, because they love their parents, they will obey the spirit of the law, and not play semantic games showing how they really obeyed even though they seemed not to.

Last Sunday <levitlaw1.htm> we began our discussion of Leviticus 17:1-16; Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 19:1-37; Leviticus 20:1-27. We saw that our relationship to God's law is quite similar to the relationship of children to their parents' rules in an ideal family. In Leviticus, the law is NOT presented to us as a way to become right with God; the law is NOT a set of hoops that God sets

up to test our willingness to obey. Jesus says that all of the Law and Prophets hang on these two commands: Love Yahweh your God with all your being, and love your neighbor as yourself.

You see how those commands parallel the characteristics of an ideal family? Just as children in the ideal family love, trust, and honor their parents, so we must love, trust, and honor Yahweh, OUR God. Just as children in the ideal family love and encourage each other, so we must love our brothers and sisters in Christ -- and, similarly, love those outside the body of Christ.

Furthermore, there is a parallel between the love of the man and wife for each other in the ideal family and the love of God. In an ideal family, the husband and wife love each other sacrificially, building each other up -- displaying the type of love that their children then exhibit in their relationships with each other. Just so, the love within the Godhead, the love of the Father for the Son, the Son for the Father, both for the Spirit, is perfect; God IS love. As we are transformed into the likeness of Christ, we too begin to display this true love one for another. An ideal family -- THAT is the picture God paints for us of our relationship to him. The law RESULTS FROM THE RELATIONSHIP. Because God is holy, because he in his very nature cannot tolerate evil, and because we are his own very precious possession, created by Him as the perfect bride for Himself, we too must be holy. Indeed, if you have received Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit dwells within you, God Himself is within you, transforming you, empowering you to be holy. We in the end will have no spot or wrinkle or blemish. So through the power of the Spirit we obey -- not to earn his favor, not even primarily to gain his commendation, but we obey because of the love we have for Him, because of the love He so graciously shows toward us. The relationship comes first -- obedience follows.

Ray Stedman puts it this way: "Christian activity never stems from the imperative of a divine command, but from the impulse of an indwelling presence." We don't obey simply because God issued a command, and we fear the consequences of not obeying. That is not Christian obedience. We obey because we are in an intimate love relationship with our gracious Creator -- so intimate that He is in us. And if the perfectly holy God, the God who cannot tolerate evil lives within us, how can we use our bodies to perform evil? That is the essence of Christian obedience. So true Christianity does not consist of "linism" Last week I defined "linism" as a rule-based morality governing our behavior, a morality that defines lines separating right from wrong. We may decide to keep on the right side of the line -- but then we move as close to the line as possible without crossing it. That is not Christianity! God calls us to pursue righteousness, to be perfect, to display the fruit of the Spirit. God calls us to the positive pursuit of goodness -- because we are His, we are to be like Him. So for the rest of this morning we will look at some of the specific commands God gives in Leviticus 17:1-16; Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 19:1-37; Leviticus 20:1-27. Always keep in mind that God gives these commands to his people AS his people -- He is THEIR God, they are His people. He is holy, they are to be holy because of their relationship to him.

Last week I indicated that we can classify the laws we find in Leviticus 17:1-16; Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 19:1-37; Leviticus 20:1-27 into four categories. Some laws display God's character explicitly. God's people are to be like him, and these laws show the Israelites what that means. An example is Leviticus 19:18 : "Love your neighbor as yourself." God is love; if we are to be like him, we too must show love.

Secondly, some laws are related to the pictures of our salvation in Christ that God paints in the first half of Leviticus. These are rich pictures for us to contemplate, but the specific restrictions no longer hold for us. For example, most of Leviticus 17:1-16, which regulates the Israelites' contact with blood, consists of such laws. Blood is a picture of life. There is nothing inherently evil, there is nothing that violates God's character in our eating blood. Rather, just as in the sacrificial system, God is teaching the Israelites about his plan of salvation and his plan for the life of his people through these pictures of blood.

(We will consider these two categories in greater depth during the course of the morning. These last two categories I will only mention:)

Thirdly, some commands are rules that help the Israelites to see how to love the Lord their God with all their hearts. The Israelites lived among an idolatrous people -- in order that they not be tempted, God restricts certain practices that are part of the idolatrous worship of other nations. For example, look at Leviticus 19:27-28 "Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD." Now, we are not tempted to idolatry by shaving the hair on the sides of our head. For us, the relevant question is: Are there things we should avoid, not bad in and of themselves, because they could lead us into idolatry? Are there activities we engage in that distract us from putting God first, from loving Him with all our heart?

Finally, some commands consist of the legal punishment for violations of laws in the ancient state of Israel. These picture the punishment such sins deserve; God hates these sins. But today such punishment is meted out not by a theocratic state, for God in the church age does not ordain theocratic states. Today this punishment is reserved for eternity, when all those not covered by the shed blood of Jesus will suffer for such sins. As an example of this, consider Leviticus 20:9 'If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him.' In this case, the restriction holds -- we are to honor our parents, as our families are to exhibit the love relationship between God and His people. But the punishment in ancient Israel prefigures God's justice in dealing with this and with all sin. In the limited time we have this morning, we will focus on two areas: The picture of blood found in Leviticus 17:1-16, and the ways that the law displays God's character. We will look into some of the tough areas in more detail during Sunday School, so please stay.

Blood and Guts Please turn in your Bibles to Leviticus 17:1-16. We'll read beginning in Leviticus 17:3 :

3 Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it 4 instead of bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD-- that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood and must be cut off from his people. 5 This is so the Israelites will bring to the LORD the sacrifices they are now making in the open fields. They must bring them to the priest, that is, to the LORD, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and sacrifice them as fellowship offerings. 6 The priest is to sprinkle the blood against the altar of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and burn the fat as an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

10 "Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood-- I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. 11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. 12 Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood." 13 "Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, 14 because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

While the purpose of these regulations may seem obscure, the restrictions at least are clear: all animals that the Israelites slaughter for food are to be brought to the tabernacle and offered to the Lord. They are not to set up butcher shops, or slaughter the animals themselves, whether inside the camp or outside. Even when hunting, Israelites were to treat the blood in a special way, draining it and the blood out in the field. Never, never were the Israelites to eat any blood.

Before we consider the reasons for this restriction, please turn with me to John 6:1-71. Given what we have just read - that no Israelites were to eat any blood - consider the impact of Jesus' statement, beginning in John 6:52 :

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. (John 6:52-56 NIV)

Those of us who grew up in even nominally Christian homes have heard these words so often that they have lost their impact. Imagine what you would think if you had never heard the words surrounding communion previously. Eat Jesus flesh? Drink his blood? This sounds disgusting! Now multiply your level of disgust several times to get the Jews' response to Jesus. Most of us have no qualms about eating red meat; we don't drain the blood out of steak before we grill it. But these Jews had never in their life eaten meat containing blood. Moreover, this wasn't because of personal preference or because they thought it was unhealthy - God had commanded them never to eat blood. Now this Jesus is telling them to drink his blood and eat his flesh! "How repulsive! How absurd!" they must have thought.

I suggest to you that Jesus here is providing us with a commentary on Leviticus 17:1-16. The key to understanding these passages is found in two phrases: "the life of every creature is its blood. (Leviticus 17:14)" and "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you (John 6:53)." Listen carefully: God commands the Israelites not to eat the blood of any animal, but then commands us to drink the blood of Jesus. He tells us not to consume animal blood, for its life is in its blood - and then He tells us to drink Jesus blood in order to have His life. Do you see what God is saying here? We are surrounded in this world with false approaches to life - Do this, and live!

Stand up for your rights!

Live it up! Don't miss out on this experience, this thrill, or you'll miss out on life!

Get rich! That's the only way to live, the only way to find satisfaction!

Find success! Devote yourself to a career!

Follow this or that guru, and find inner peace; get in touch with the god within you!

The animal blood, the blood of the world, stands for all these false approaches to life, these false ways of finding joy. We belong to God - we are not to try to find true life, true satisfaction in the things of this world. All these things pass away, all are but for a moment - in contrast, God has chosen us for an eternity of intimacy with Him.

No. Christians cannot find true life via these paths. Consuming the blood of these animals was a picture of participating in these false ideas of life. God has something better for us! So Jesus comes and says: "You Pharisees think that by avoiding eating blood you are obeying God. But you are to drink MY blood and eat MY flesh! This is the only way to true life - true joy, true love, and true peace. The only life worth having comes from Me! So drink up my life!"

What a rich picture for us today, at the turn of the 21st century America! These days there are so many temptations to put our relationship with God to the backburner, to focus on our career, our family, our entertainment - but God says, "Eat no blood of this world! Don't try to find life in anything but Me!" Does the blood of Jesus, the life we have in Christ, satisfy you? Are you fulfilled completely by your relationship with God? Can you say with Paul that to live is Christ, and to die is gain? Can you say with him that you count all your worldly success as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ? That is the message of the blood. This is not some mysterious, obscure command; this is not some regulation to follow mechanically; this is an image of central importance to our life as Christians: Where do you find life?

#### God's Character in the Law

Let us now turn our attention to the revelation of God's character found in these four chapters. Remember, God wants us to become like him, and to be in a perfect relationship with him. So these laws tell the Israelites how to do both. In the first several cases, I will simply state the characteristic and read verses that describe it (stay for Sunday School for more depth.) We will spend more time on the complicated issue of sexuality.

##### (i) God cares for the poor and disabled

19:9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

19:14 "Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.

##### (ii) God is just, and his justice is not affected by social standing

19:15 "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

##### (iii) God is love

19:11 "Do not steal. "Do not lie. "Do not deceive one another. 12 "Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD. 13 "Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. "Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.

16 "Do not go about spreading slander among your people. "Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD. 17 "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. 18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

. . . God's love extends to those who are different than you, and those you do business with

33 "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. 34 The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God. 35 "Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. 36 Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt.

(iv) (Listen carefully here) God the Son reveres and respects God the Father; so we too must give respect where that is due 19:32 "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

19:3 "Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God. 4 "Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.

(v) Finally, our sexuality reflects God's image.

Leviticus 18:1-30 prohibits sexual sins -- primarily incest but also others, including homosexual behavior. As we indicated last week, those churches that have adopted "open and affirming" stances toward homosexuality argue that this whole section of Leviticus is irrelevant for us today.

We have seen that at least Leviticus 17:1-16, Leviticus 19:1-37 and Leviticus 20:1-27 are quite relevant when properly understood. But how do we understand Leviticus 18:1-30?

First of all, note that God uses strong language in the condemnation of these sins. Consider Leviticus 18:24-30 :

24 "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. 25 Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. 26 But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, 27 for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. 28 And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. 29 "Everyone who does any of these detestable things-- such persons must be cut off from their people. 30 Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God."

Sexual sin was rampant among the Canaanites and the Egyptians; sexual sin was also combined with their religious idolatry. This sin was so great that the land vomited them out -- and the land will do that again if the Israelites engage in such sin. This is serious.

Why? Why does God take sexual sin so seriously? This topic clearly deserves more than the five minutes we can devote to it this morning. In this brief time I want you to see two points: Our sexuality is related to our being made in the image of God. Our sexuality is related to our becoming the bride of Christ. To see the first of these, let us look briefly at the beginning, Genesis 1:1-31, to see how this first holds. Look at Genesis 1:26-27 :

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. As is so often the case in Hebrew, in Genesis 1:27 the author emphasizes a point by saying it slightly differently three times. The point: God made us in His image, and that image includes our sexuality. In some way, our sexuality reflects God's image. How?

I believe the answer is that our God is a trinity, three persons united in a single Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love each other, have a perfect intimacy with each other. There is a unity in their diversity. In marriage, two persons become one spiritual and physical flesh; in the Godhead, three persons are fully one. So God made us male and female in part to display the unity in diversity that exists in Him.

Secondly, our sexuality pictures the unity between Christ and the church, as we become His perfect bride. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:1-33 (first quoting Genesis 2:24):

31 FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Christ and the church are intimate, as man and wife are intimate. The unity that we have in marriage is akin to the unity that exists now and will exist for all eternity between Christ and the church. So our sexuality is key aspect of our becoming like Christ, of our taking on God's character. Once again, God is not setting up an arbitrary set of hoops that we are to jump through. God is revealing his character in us -- and that revelation of his character includes our proper use of the gift of sexuality God has granted us. So the restrictions in this chapter still hold for us, including the restriction on homosexual behavior. There is only one exception to this. Leviticus 18:19 forbids sexual relations during the time a woman is unclean because of her period. The word "unclean" shows that this one restriction is related not to God's character, but to Leviticus 11:1-47, Leviticus 12:1-8, Leviticus 13:1-59, Leviticus 14:1-57 and the prohibition of contact with blood in Leviticus 17:1-16. The concepts of clean and unclean have a profound spiritual significance for us (see previous sermon) <levitclean1.htm>, but none of those restrictions relating to uncleanness hold for us today. So our sexuality reflects God's image; God created us male and female, that we may be one, yet different, as He is both one and different.

**CONCLUSION** So what is your attitude towards God's law? Are you trying to find life in the blood of this world, in the attractions that this world has to offer? Do you feel that God is restricting you?

Do you grudgingly obey because He says so, all the time thinking, "I sure would like to cross that line!" Do you keep nudging the line, moving it but not crossing it?

God has not set up a list of rules so he can punish you for breaking them. God is not trying to limit your pleasure, or your fulfillment. No. As Tony Evans <<http://www.tonyevans.org/>> says, "God wants for you what you would want for yourself if you had sense enough to want it!"

God is our loving Father, making us into his perfect likeness. He is preparing us for an eternity of joy in His presence: Listen to John's vision of the future:

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, 4 and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:1-5 NIV) In God's presence, as Christ's perfect bride, we will experience a level of love, joy, and peace that we cannot even imagine right now; we will love each other perfectly and be loved perfectly in return. God is transforming us into His likeness, and the law displays his character. May we obey and thus hasten our becoming like Him. Praise God.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 1/17/99. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## 01.15. A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God (Lev\_23:1-44)

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A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God A Sermon on Leviticus 23:1-44 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, Mark 01267, 2/28/99

What is the most fundamental form of evil? What is at the heart of all the manifestations of evil you can imagine -- murder, rape, hatred, terrorism?

Recent news offers us some choices: Perhaps the most fundamental form of evil is dragging a man to death because of the color of his skin, as happened in Texas, or wholesale slaughter of one ethnic group by another, as might happen in Kosovo. This week we want to turn our attention to Leviticus 23:1-44. This chapter has been called God's calendar, because it describes festivals God planned for the people of Israel

Most of us turn to calendars to plan or check our agenda for the next few days or months. We don't often turn to calendars to find the answer to deep questions of life. But I would like to suggest that God's calendar does answer such questions, as God through these festivals pictures the proper Christian life. God mandates that the people of Israel perform particular rituals on specific dates as a way of acting out truths that you and I need to take to heart. In the course of this morning, we will see that God uses His calendar to focus our attention on the dangers inherent in one particular form of evil: Self-righteousness. God shows through these pictures that His people are only truly His when they have abandoned self, when they trust fully in him, when they are able to fall at His feet and pray, "Lord, without you I am nothing, but by your grace you have lifted me up." In our survey of Leviticus, we have seen that each of the rituals God ordains for the people of Israel contains a picture of New Testament truth. Early in the series we noted that interpreting Leviticus is more akin to interpreting Jesus' parables than interpreting a letter of Paul. When Jesus talks about a farmer sowing seed, he's not giving lessons for how to plant crops; he is giving spiritual lessons through the picture of the sower and the seed. Just so, as we read about different requirements for the people of Israel, our job is to learn the spiritual lessons pictured by each. Let's briefly remind ourselves of some of those lessons:

Leviticus 1:1-17, Leviticus 2:1-16, Leviticus 3:1-17, Leviticus 4:1-35, Leviticus 5:1-19, Leviticus 6:1-30, Leviticus 7:1-38 describe the five offerings God establishes. Recall that each of these offerings portrays a different provision for God's people, granted through Jesus' death on the cross.

Leviticus 8:1-36, Leviticus 9:1-24, Leviticus 10:1-20 describe God's plan for a priesthood. We saw that, today, God intends each and every Christian to serve as a priest. The clothing, the ordination, and the requirements for the Levitical priests contain rich images that help us to understand our role before God today.

Leviticus 11:1-47, Leviticus 12:1-8, Leviticus 13:1-59, Leviticus 14:1-57, Leviticus 15:1-33 present the laws of cleanness and uncleanness. These show the necessity of preparation prior to entering God's presence, and His provisions for cleansing after being defiled by the world.

Leviticus 16:1-34 describes in detail one of the festivals, the Day of Atonement. This ritual emphasizes the efficacy of Christ's death not only in satisfying the requirements of God's justice, but also in doing away with our own guilt.

Then in Leviticus 17:1-16, Leviticus 18:1-30, Leviticus 19:1-37, Leviticus 20:1-27, God presents His holiness code, a set of laws which answers the question: What does it mean to be holy, to be God's own sacred possession? We saw that holiness is a result of our relationship to God, not a prerequisite for that relationship. Our obedience, our becoming like Him, is a logical consequence of His choosing us as His people. We also saw that the laws which reveal God's character still hold for us today -- because we are to become like Christ. Those laws, however, which were picturing New Testament truth do not hold for Christians -- we fulfill them by living out the pictured truth. This brings us to Leviticus 23:1-44, and the outline of the Israelite festivals. Once again we need to ask the question: As Christians, should we obey the specific requirements listed here? Should we avoid work on the Sabbath? Should we celebrate each of these feasts at different times of the year? Or is all of God's calendar a picture of the Christian life, and so we fulfill the calendar by living out the Christian truths pictured in the festivals? The Sabbath

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 23:1 The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD'S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations--My appointed times are these: 3 'For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the LORD.

God begins the description of the feasts by discussing the Sabbath, for all of the feasts to be described later in the chapter are special forms of the Sabbath. Note a few characteristics of the Sabbath that we can glean from this brief description:

Observance of the Sabbath is regular and frequent. The other festivals are observed only once a year, while the Sabbath is every seventh day.

The Sabbath is a time of gathering together, a time of "holy convocation."

The Sabbath is a time of rest. No work is to be done on this day. Indeed, the words translated "a Sabbath of complete rest" are just the adjective and noun forms of the word for "sabbath" right next to each other. So a literal translation might be a "sabbatical sabbath" or a "restful day of rest."

Consider also Exodus 31:15, which reads: For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death.

What is God picturing in the Sabbath? Why did he institute this weekly observance of a day of rest? Why such a heavy emphasis again and again on the absence of work? And what possible reason could God have for instituting such an extreme penalty for engaging in work on the Sabbath? As always, we need to use Scripture to interpret Scripture. There are many New Testament passages that help us to understand the Sabbath; this morning we will look at two of the most relevant. First, please turn with me to Colossians 2:16-17. Paul deals with a legalistic heresy in the Colossian church by writing these words:

16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Paul says here that the Sabbath day is a shadow. A shadow! The Sabbath symbolizes some spiritual truth; it is not the reality itself. Furthermore, Paul equates Sabbath observance with observance of the other Jewish festivals. We as Christians do not need to observe the explicit Sabbath regulations any more than we need to observe the Feast of Tabernacles.

Many Christians are confused here. They think of Sunday as the Sabbath, and believe the regulations for the Sabbath laid out in the Old Testament should be transferred to Sunday. But this is not the case. I can't imagine how Paul could have been clearer in Colossians: The Sabbath is a shadow. What is the reality?

Hebrews 4:1-16 makes this clear. The author of Hebrews here is expositing Psalms 95:1-11 where God, angered at the hardness of the Israelites' hearts, declares they shall never enter His rest. The author of Hebrews shows that God was not talking about "rest" simply as the entering of the promised land, nor simply as the cessation of work on the weekly Sabbath. He concludes in Hebrews 4:9-11 :

9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. As Doug pointed out last week, entering God's rest is a picture of our depending completely, totally on the shed blood of Jesus for our righteous position before God. We must "rest from our own work," we must stop trying to make ourselves righteous, for we can't do it. And this is how we fulfill the Sabbath! Note that the author of Hebrews makes this explicit in Hebrews 4:9 : there remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God, as they rest from their own work. The Sabbath is first and foremost a picture of our giving up trying to make ourselves worthy of entering God's presence, of our acknowledging that we can never live up to His standards, that we can never approach God on the basis of any accomplishment. That is how we keep the Sabbath! And that is why the penalty for violating the Sabbath is so severe!

Recall that I opened today by saying self-righteousness is the fundamental sin. The self-righteous person believes, "Because I did X or Y, I am better than those other fellows; God now must appreciate me." A self-righteous person is trusting in his own work, his own faithfulness, his own ability to keep rules and regulations better than other people, in order to justify his standing before God.

Violating the Sabbath corresponds to the sin of self-righteousness. So as God pictures this in the life of the people of Israel, he mandates death for Sabbath violators -- because spiritually a Sabbath-violator, a self-righteous person, will not enter the kingdom of heaven. We must become poor in spirit, broken, crushed, depending on Christ and on him alone, if we are to receive God's gift of eternal life in his son. We fulfill the Sabbath by resting completely and totally on His work in our lives.

Before we move on to the next festival, however, I want to make one last comment on resting. Sometimes we have the mistaken conception that resting means sitting back on our haunches,

waiting for God to complete His work and take us to heaven. Sometimes we are even told to do nothing, to "let go and let God." But what does the author of Hebrews tell us?

Make every effort to enter that rest. (Hebrews 4:11) This is a very strange phrase, a paradox: "Make every effort to enter that rest." This is a little like saying, "Work real hard to go to sleep." What does the author mean?

Recall that throughout the New Testament epistles, the apostles exhort us with command after command:

Put off the old man!

Put on the new man!

Count yourselves dead to sin and alive to God!

Flee youthful lusts!

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness!

There are hundreds more. This doesn't sound like our sitting back and doing nothing.

Furthermore, look at the example of Paul himself. Did he sit back and take it easy? By no means! He supported himself financially while devoting himself wholeheartedly to the task to which God called him. But Paul did enter God's rest, while in this life. He tells us how in Colossians 1:29, where he brings the concepts of work and rest together beautifully: To this end I labor, -- labor! toil! -- striving with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me. Do you see what Paul is saying? We are to work hard -- but our work consists of learning to depend on His power! We must turn our thoughts, our will to Him, so we are not deceived by the deceitfulness of sin. We must remind ourselves and each other again and again of the truths of who we are in Christ, of Who is in control of this world. We must depend on the power of the Spirit within us to conform us to His image.

So, we are to rest. Yes, rest! But this is an active rest, an active dependence upon God. Our task as Christians is not simply to let go and let God. Our task as Christians is not one day to say we believe, then to get dunked under water, then wait for God to perfect us and take us to heaven. We are to regularly turn our focus to God, not allowing ourselves to be distracted by the entanglements and temptations around us. This is how we keep the Sabbath, and why the Sabbath is a regular event. We must daily, hourly turn away from ourselves and our efforts, and lean on God and on his power. In this way, we obey the fourth commandment, fulfilling the Sabbath. With that central understanding of rest, we can now turn more briefly to the other festivals Passover and Unleavened Bread Turn back to Leviticus 23:4

'These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. 5 'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover. 6 'Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. 8 'But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.'"

You remember the first Passover, which coincided with the last of the Egyptian plagues. God determined to kill the firstborn son in every family in Egypt. The Israelites could be spared -- but they were not spared simply because of their bloodline. Instead, they were spared because of the Blood! God gives explicit instructions in Exodus 12:1-51 for the slaughtering of year-old, male sheep or goats, and the placement of animal's blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes of each house. Then, the destroying angel passed over any house covered by that blood. The firstborn sons of the believing Israelites are saved because of the blood. This clearly pictures the role of Jesus' blood in covering us, in saving us from the death we deserve.

Furthermore, recall the day of Jesus' death. Jesus died at the time of the Passover. Jesus himself was the true Passover lamb. The Feast of Unleavened Bread immediately follows Passover. For an entire week, the Israelites were to avoid leaven, or yeast of any type. Remember that the Israelites did not buy packets of Fleischman's yeast. Their yeast was what we would call sourdough starter: yeast-filled dough left over from the last bread baking. Also, like sourdough starter, this yeast was wild, with a strong flavor.

What does leaven or yeast picture? You may recall that this topic came up when we were discussing the present or grain offering <levit3.htm>. Mixing a small amount of sourdough starter with a whole batch of dough flavors the entire batch. The yeast spreads and grows throughout the dough. Jesus uses this image of a small amount of sourdough flavoring the whole both positively and negatively. The kingdom of God is said to be like yeast, in that a few Christians can have a major impact on our surrounding country or culture (Matthew 13:33). More frequently, however, the New Testament uses the image of yeast negatively, referring to errors that may seem small at first but which can grow to destroy an entire ministry. So Jesus refers to the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:6 ff): that is, legalism and hypocrisy.

Paul uses the image of the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread in 1 Corinthians. The church in Corinth was tolerating a man who was engaged in blatant sin. Indeed, they not only were tolerating this man, but they were proud of their tolerance. So Paul writes: Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

Paul says, "Do not tolerate unrepented sin in your midst. This sin will flavor your entire church, making you ineffective and unproductive. Just as in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, clean out all the yeast that you can find. For Christ is our Passover; he died for us, that we might live to him. So depend on him, live individual and corporate lives worthy of His calling."

Firstfruits Let us continue reading at Leviticus 23:9 :

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 'And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

Three of the Israelite feasts correspond to harvest times in Palestine. The barley harvest begins in April, at the time of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. The wheat harvest begins about seven weeks later, at the time of Pentecost. Then the summer crops -- grapes and other fruits and vegetables -- would be harvested in September, at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering. The dedication of firstfruits takes place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Note carefully the day this takes place, as indicated in verse 11: The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins with the Sabbath right after Passover; the day after this Sabbath is Firstfruits.

What day of the week is Firstfruits? The day after the Sabbath is the first day of the week, right? Jesus died during Passover time, and then rose when? One the first day of the week! Jesus rose on the day of Firstfruits!

Paul must have been thinking of this when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:20 : But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

Christ is the beginning of the harvest, the first human to rise from the dead and receive a resurrection body. We will follow -- the full harvest is yet to come. But the firstfruits are in!

Pentecost Let's return to Leviticus 23:1-44 one more time; we will begin reading in Leviticus 23:15 :

15 'You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 'You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD. 17 'You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the LORD. This Feast is called Pentecost because it takes place 50 days later. Firstfruits are offered again, this time of bread, for the wheat harvest is now taking place. And note, curiously, that for this feast the Israelites offer leavened bread -- yeast is used in the baking of this bread.

What day of the week is this feast on? See Leviticus 23:15 : "the day after the seventh Sabbath." So this, once again, is the first day of the week. What happened on that first Pentecost Sunday after Jesus' death? Read about it in Acts 2:1-47 : the Holy Spirit came down, appearing as flames of fire, and began the church age by indwelling believers in a new way, for the first time. This occasion marked the firstfruits of the gospel message, the firstfruits of the Spirit. But why is this offering baked with yeast? The Firstfruits offered in April signify Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the first person to receive a perfect, resurrection body. Those bodies will be free of sin, perfect, spotless; they are incorruptible, never to grow old or perish in all eternity. But Pentecost symbolizes the Spirit making us new, with the apostles and their followers in the temple being the firstfruits. These early believers that day became new creations, their spirits were made new -- but they were still sinners! They still contained the yeast of this world. Not until the final resurrection -- pictured in one of the last feasts -- will we be without sin, forever and ever.

Isn't this amazing? Do you see how God planned all these events, so that events took place on exactly the right day to elucidate the meaning of the feasts?

Conclusion

Next week we will consider the last three feasts, which take place in September, and then move on to Leviticus 25:1-55 the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee. But we can see even now that all of these feasts declare our dependence on God: our need to be covered by the blood of Jesus, our need to lean on Him to root out the leaven in our lives, our need for the indwelling Holy Spirit. So where are you? Are you trusting and depending on the strength of Another? Or are you still trusting in yourself -- your abilities and talents? Are you still thinking that God owes you something because of your faithfulness, because of your work for him?

I believe God arranges circumstances so that each of us must face our brokenness -- so that he can then use us. Many of you know how God accomplished this in my own life. As a youth living outside of Washington, DC, I saw the many bad and broken marriages among the parents of my friends. I determined that I would never let that happen in my own life; should I marry, I would make it work.

Once I met Beth, the future prospects for a perfect marriage seemed bright; she and I shared many interests and simply enjoyed being together. I had succeeded in all I had set out to do; I set out to have a successful marriage; there could be no question that I would accomplish the task. I remember in particular attending a communication seminar for those interested in marriage, and thinking, "This stuff is easy! We will have no trouble communicating." In June of 1982, however, scarcely 30 months after our wedding, our marriage was in shambles -- and there was nothing I could do to save it. Not only had I failed to make the marriage work; I myself had brought my marriage to the brink of failure. Furthermore, this "perfect woman" whom I had chosen and idolized had done the same.

Like Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych confronting death, I was confronted with my sinfulness in a syllogism: All men are sinners, I am a man, therefore . . . . While all my life I had acknowledged intellectually my own sinfulness, now I stared into the horrible, deeply personal nature of sin itself: I was destroying what I wanted, loved, and cherished most. By God's grace, that day I fell on my knees before Him, acknowledging my own sinfulness and inability to save my marriage. By His grace, he also turned Beth to Himself within the next few months. By His grace, He had arranged for us to be in East Africa, 8000 miles from home, where we would hear the gospel stripped of the common cultural accoutrements of American Christianity, and thus hear it anew. And God through His grace healed our marriage over the course of the next year, teaching us through Scripture and through examples the true nature of this most intimate human relationship.

God had to break me to use me. As long as I thought I could accomplish whatever I wanted by my talent and energy, I was of no use to God.

Ray Stedman states it this way: That is what God is at work to do. The worst form of evil is self-righteousness. If we think we have something that God needs, and that we can serve him by our dedicated spirit, he will find some way to pull the rug out from under us and to bring us at last to the place where we stand before him without any merit of our own. And with joy filling our hearts we know that this is the way God intended men to live -- to rest in the work of Another.

Resting in the work of Another -- that is how we fulfill the Sabbath; that is how we fulfill all of these Feasts. Here is true rest -- in the Blood of Christ.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 2/28/99. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## 01.16. Your Inheritance (Lev\_25:1-55)

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Your Inheritance: Glorious Discovery to a Lonely Wretch A Sermon on the Fall Feasts and the Jubilee (Leviticus 23:1-44; Leviticus 25:1-55) by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, March 7, 1999 What is the value of an inheritance?

Suppose that you were an orphan; you never knew your father and mother, you never knew a mother's love or a father's care. All your life you have been without money, and without love.

Now you receive word: You have a rich uncle! He has been searching for you! He loves you and wants you as part of his family! All that you have never known -- wealth, and family, and love -- is now yours in abundance. You are the heir!

We love such stories, don't we? The poor orphan, without hope, who all along is really the son or daughter of someone important. Two of the best such stories are C.S. Lewis' *The Horse and His Boy* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* <<http://www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/ReadingRoom/Fiction/CBronte/JaneEyre/>>. Both supposed orphans, Shasta and Jane, grow in character as they deal with adversity -- and then, in the end, discover that they are heirs to a fortune, related to those that they already love and admire. Many of you will remember how the central characters react when they discover the blessings that are theirs. Having been poor, both appreciate the money and the freedom from want it provides -- but of far greater value is the knowledge that they have family, that they are loved and cherished. Listen to Jane describing her emotions when she receives this good news:

Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed! -- wealth for the heart! -- a mine of pure, genial affections. This was a blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating! -- not like the ponderous gift of gold: rich and welcome enough in its way, but sobering from its weight. I now clapped my hands in sudden joy -- my pulse bounded, my veins thrilled.

What is the value of an inheritance? Freedom from want. Freedom from worry. Confidence in the love of another. Knowing that you belong, that you are not alone, that you are not a lonely wretch. You are family. In the book of Leviticus, God pictures for us the inheritance that is ours as His people, an inheritance that is guarded for us, an inheritance than can never perish, spoil, or fade -- despite our own errors, despite our own profligacy. Last week <[levitfestival.htm](#)> we began our discussion of Leviticus 23:1-44, in which God lays out for Moses His calendar: the regular celebration of the Sabbath, and the annual celebration of seven festivals.

We first saw how the Sabbath pictures for us our need to rest in God, to depend on Him and on Him alone for our righteousness -- and for our ability to accomplish any good work.

Then we discussed the four spring celebrations: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost. During the first Passover, the Israelites smeared the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorframes, so that the Angel of Death would pass over their houses, sparing their firstborn sons. That blood represents the blood of Christ, paying the penalty for our sin, so that we might

not suffer our due punishment. And so God arranged history so that Jesus died at the time of the Passover. The feast of Unleavened Bread immediately follow Passover. The Israelites eat no yeast, no leaven at this time, signifying the cleansing from all subtle forms of evil. Firstfruits takes place on the first day of the week during Unleavened Bread -- the very day that Jesus rose from the dead. Just as the first stalks of the barley harvest are offered up to God, Jesus is the "firstfruits of those that sleep," the first human to receive a resurrection body, incorruptible and eternal. The last of the spring feasts, Pentecost, takes place 50 days later. This coincides with the wheat harvest, when the Israelites would offer bread baked with yeast to God. And on this day, the Holy Spirit began the church age by appearing as flames of fire at the Temple, indwelling believers in a new way for the first time, as prophesied by Joel centuries before. So we become new creations as temples of the Holy Spirit -- but still living in sinful bodies, still sinning, as represented by the bread baked with yeast.

Today we will look at the last 3 feasts of Leviticus 23:1-44, which picture the beginning of the new heavens and the new earth, the culmination of the harvest of which Jesus is the firstfruits -- and then turn to Leviticus 25:1-55, which discusses God's long-term calendar, the special years that God ordains. God here ordains both a Sabbath year and a year of Jubilee. We will see that this year of Jubilee pictures the joy that we share with Shasta and Jane Eyre: the joy of knowing that we have an inheritance that is secure, the joy of being freedom to love and be loved, the joy of knowing that we are family for the God of the universe.

Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hoshanah) So please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 23:1-44. We'll begin reading with Leviticus 23:23 :

23 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month on the first of the month, you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. 25 'You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.'"

These three final feasts all take place during the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, corresponding roughly with September. This is the time of the grape harvest, and the time of harvesting other summer crops. Although this is the seventh month of the ceremonial calendar (counting from the month of Passover), in the civil calendar this is the first month, the time of Jewish New Year. This month, in effect, is a celebration of the anniversary of the creation of the world -- and we'll see that all three of these feasts prefigure the creation of the new heavens and new earth, God's new creation. The first is the Feast of Trumpets, or Rosh Hoshanah. Little is known about this celebration -- indeed, the word "trumpets" does not even appear in the Hebrew in Leviticus 23:24 (though Numbers 29:1 clarifies that trumpets are what is being blown). The Israelites are to offer burnt offerings, symbolizing Israel's belonging completely to God, and grain or present offerings, symbolizing their offering themselves back to God.

New Testament references to the use of trumpets emphasize their sounding at the time of the new creation. Consider what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians:

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52) For the Lord Himself will

descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise. (1 Thessalonians 4:16) So the Feast of Trumpets seems to be heralding the new creation, the time when the harvest will be complete -- when all of us will receive new, resurrection bodies, when the heavens and earth will be changed. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

Let's continue reading in Leviticus 23:26 : 26 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 27 "On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. 28 "Neither shall you do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God.

Leviticus 16:1-34 discusses the Day of Atonement in detail. We saw in an earlier sermon <levitatone.htm> that the High Priest here acts out Jesus' atoning sacrifice for our sins. God also gives us here a vivid picture of our freedom from guilt, as the scapegoat disappears into the desert, bearing our sins far away into the wilderness, separating us from our sins as far as the east is from the west.

How are these pictures relevant to the end of the world as we know it -- and to the beginning of the new creation?

There is a sense in which Jesus' work was accomplished once and for all on the cross. No more sacrifice for sins is necessary. As the author of Hebrews points out, that one sacrifice once and for all satisfies the requirements of God's justice. But there is another sense in which Jesus' work continues even today. You and I continue to sin, we continue to experience guilt, we continue to suffer from the effects of sin. The penalty is paid, our relationship to God is secure if we receive Jesus and believe in His name, but each day we need to seek forgiveness for our sins. When will this end? After the sounding of the trumpet! After the completion of God's harvest! Then the atonement will be complete. There will be no more need cover additional sins. Jesus' work will then be complete.

Recall John's vision recorded in Revelation 21:4 :

He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

We frequently think of this verse, rightly, in terms of the end of physical pain, or the end of mourning because of the death of a loved one. But this verse clearly also refers to the ending of mourning for our own sinfulness, the pain of guilt for sins we have committed. All that too has passed away. We then have a new body -- a body not tainted with sin, and we dwell with people not tainted with sin. There will be no more sin! It's ended! No more guilt! No more falling into bad habits! No more struggle with temptation! So the atonement will be complete and perfect. Always sufficient, the atonement of Jesus' death will now have accomplished all that was intended. The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth) Let's return one last time to Leviticus 23:1-44, Leviticus 23:33 :

33 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 34 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD. 35 'On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. 36 'For seven days you shall

present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work. This feast is called Tabernacles, Booths, or Ingathering (for its coinciding with the grape harvest). For seven days the Israelites are to live in temporary shelters, as they did during the exodus from Egypt. Now, you might think that this would be a time of sadness: "Oh, poor us, we had to live in shacks all those years!"

Quite the contrary. As many references in the Old Testament make clear, the Feast of Tabernacles is a time of great rejoicing, a time of exultant praise to God. The Israelites here are celebrating their freedom from slavery, their leaving Egypt.

What is the parallel in the future? This is the final feast, lasting for a complete seven days, a feast of great rejoicing, celebrating the end of slavery. This feast foreshadows our time in heaven, united with Jesus, praising God as we sing out, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto Him, and unto the Lamb!" This feast foreshadows the final end of all the impact of sin on us. So these three fall feasts all picture the great rejoicing that is ours at the beginning not only of a new year, but the beginning of a new creation. With the trumpet blast, we will all be changed -- an there will be no more guilt, no more sin; we are freed from slavery for ever and ever. Praise God! The Sabbath Year

Let's now turn to Leviticus 25:1 The LORD then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the LORD. 3 'Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 4 but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. . . .

20 'But if you say, "What are we going to eat on the seventh year if we do not sow or gather in our crops?" 21 then I will so order My blessing for you in the sixth year that it will bring forth the crop for three years. 22 'When you are sowing the eighth year, you can still eat old things from the crop, eating the old until the ninth year when its crop comes in.

God here ordains not only the Sabbath day, celebrated every week, but a Sabbath year -- a year in which no agricultural work is to be done. Remember that Israel in 1400BC is almost exclusively an agricultural economy. God here is calling a halt to all productive work for a year. Can you imagine that? Elsewhere in this chapter he says they are not even to pick the fruit from the volunteer crops that might spring up from seeds left in the fields. They are to depend completely on God's provision. God promises in Leviticus 23:21-22 that he will provide them with such an abundant harvest in the sixth year that they will have enough to live on without working for the Sabbath year.

Think of the faith that would be required to fulfill this commandment! God says, "Don't work for a full year! Don't depend on your own strength! Trust me; I will provide!" The Sabbath year reminds me of the story Luke tells in chapter five of his gospel. Peter and his colleagues have been fishing all night. Jesus tells them to cast their nets again. Peter responds:

Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets. (Luke 5:5) Can you hear the note of exasperation in Peter's voice? He seems to be saying, "Look, I've seen you heal my mother-in-law. I've heard your teaching, and I acknowledge

your wisdom. But while you may be a carpenter, and a healer, and a teacher -- I'm the fisherman! I know what I'm doing! This is one area I know more about than you!"

Despite his feelings, Peter obeys -- and catches so many fish he has to call his friends in another boat to come and help.

Through the Sabbath year, God shows the people of Israel that He knows more about agriculture than they do. He knows more about the growth of plants, and the causes of rain than they. And he requires their trust in this area of their lives. But the Israelites never gave God that trust; the nation of Israel never celebrated a Sabbath year. And in consequence, as 2 Chronicles 36:1-23 makes clear, God sent them into exile in Babylon for seventy years, making up for all those Sabbath years that the people had not observed.

Through the Sabbath year, God impresses upon us once again this central point: "Rest in me! You can accomplish nothing without me, spiritually or materially. All good gifts are from me -- even what you regard as the fruit of your own hard work."

You see, true life, true accomplishment is found in dependence, not in independence. We are to live in active dependence upon the God of the universe. He is the source of true fulfillment; he is the source of true satisfaction. Our own efforts lead at best to a temporary success; in the end, all our efforts lead to frustration. But by God's power we can accomplish all things; by depending on Him, we play a role in His plan for the redemption of the world. So rest in Him! The Year of Jubilee

Let's continue reading in Leviticus 25:8 "'Count off seven sabbaths of years-- seven times seven years-- so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. 9 Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. 10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan.

Recall that in the Bible, the number seven represents perfection or completion. So seven times seven is complete perfection, or perfect completion. This year of Jubilee appears to be a special Sabbath year, every 50 years. While this is a different picture, many of the connotations are similar to the three seventh-month feast we discussed earlier -- and so God has the Year of Jubilee proclaimed on the Day of Atonement.

What is the cause of celebration? See Leviticus 25:10 : "Proclaim liberty throughout the land!" (You may recall that these words are inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.)

Liberty! Freedom! The year of Jubilee is a celebration of freedom. The Hebrew word translated "liberty" connotes being without constraint, flowing freely like a stream, or running freely.

One of my favorite forms of Kenyan wildlife is a type of antelope called a topee. I believe God enjoyed designing the topee, for it is quite an amusing animal. It's rather silly-looking, actually: a big head, a long nose, rear legs shorter than forelegs. Topees spend a lot of their time standing on little tufts of grass, maybe a foot higher than the surrounding ground -- to what end, I don't know. But topees love to run. Oh, they can run fast when pursued by predators -- but most of the time they run just for the fun of it. They will run in circles and then leap up into the air, then leap three times in a row, then run some more -- just delighting in the ability to run freely. And when running

these funny-looking animals become pictures of grace and speed.

That's the type of liberty and freedom celebrated in the year of Jubilee: No restraints. Genuine joy. Real freedom.

Note that the year is proclaimed on the Day of Atonement. On the very day which symbolizes our forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, God proclaims liberty and freedom. You see the importance of this? As Ray Stedman says, "All liberty arises out of redemption." Liberty and freedom do not mean doing whatever we want, following our own selfish desires. That is slavery, not freedom! True liberty arises from our acknowledging who we are before God, and becoming what He intends us to be.

God paints a detailed picture of freedom in the specifics of the year of Jubilee. We do not have time to look at all of the chapter, but the central ideas come out in these verses:

13 "In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property. 14 If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. 15 You are to buy from your countryman on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And he is to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. 16 When the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what he is really selling you is the number of crops. 17 Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the LORD your God.

23 "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. 24 Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land. 25 If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold. 26 If, however, a man has no one to redeem it for him but he himself prospers and acquires sufficient means to redeem it, 27 he is to determine the value for the years since he sold it and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it; he can then go back to his own property. 28 But if he does not acquire the means to repay him, what he sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and he can then go back to his property. (Leviticus 25:13-17; Leviticus 25:23-28) I want to draw your attention to two important concepts from these verses.

First, who owns the land? Look at Leviticus 25:23 : "The land is mine! You are aliens and tenants!" The Israelites do not own the land they are farming; instead, they have usage rights to the land. To use scholars' jargon, the Israelites have usufructuary rights, not freehold title; they can farm the land, but cannot sell those rights to someone else in perpetuity. The most they can sell is a lease on the land until the next year of Jubilee.

Second, why is this important? What impact does this have on the economy of the Israel? The land allocated to families after the conquering of Canaan would stay in those families forever! (There is one exception to this which you can find in Leviticus 27:16-21 : if someone dedicates the land to the Lord and then, in effect, reneges on that promise by selling the lease on the land, at the year of Jubilee the land becomes the property of the priests. This exception has some similarities to Esau's selling his birthright to Jacob, or Ananias and Saphira claiming to give the proceeds of their land sale to the church.) Families are free to sell a lease on their land up until the next year of

Jubilee -- but they will always get their land back at that time.

Why is this important for Israel? This rule -- if it had been implemented by the Israelites -- would have assured that there was no long-term poverty in the country. Israel would have remained a relatively egalitarian society. Remember that Israel was an agricultural society. Land is the main form of capital, the primary means of production that is combined with labor to produce economic output. So assuring access to land means assuring a family that they will be able to generate income.

Think about the sources of poverty. The head of a family may become a drunkard, or might be lazy, or might suffer through some natural disaster, leading to the loss of all the family's assets. In most societies for most of human history, once that happens, it is very difficult for the children, the grandchildren, and the great grandchildren to overcome that handicap. Selling labor alone usually has not generated sufficient income to allow for accumulating savings and, thus, productive capital. So the sins of one family head, or a natural disaster decades or centuries in the past, can lead to long term poverty. But in Israel that would never happen! Even if my father is a drunkard, even if my father wastes all my family's resources, and sells the family's land to pay for his habit, I know that within my lifetime the land will come back to me. The year of Jubilee is coming! And my inheritance is secure. So no error, no economic sin, no natural disaster has consequences lasting more than fifty years.

Also, consider how much anger and bitterness is caused by fights about asset ownership. Think of the situation in South Africa, where one group of people took most of the best land, either legally or by force, more than 100 years ago. The pain and anger and economic destitution that resulted from that act continues today. In effect, the year of Jubilee puts an end to all that. There may be some dispute about who should own the land after transactions have taken place, but when Jubilee comes, it all goes back to the original family. So Jubilee shows God's concern for the poor, for making sure that the poor have a chance to work hard and make a living for themselves. Jubilee also serves to ensure that Israel would not be a society dominated by a few, or a society torn apart by civil strife. All this is relevant for us today, as we consider how to set up our own civil society. But what is the spiritual picture for us? All of these regulations we have discussed in Leviticus picture spiritual truths -- what is the truth represented by the year of Jubilee? To answer that question, we need to ask another first: What is represented spiritually by the Promised Land? The crossing of the Jordan River, the entering of Canaan, represents what spiritual event? Recall that Egypt is a picture of slavery to sin, being lost in our trespasses. Crossing the Jordan is sometimes thought of as entering heaven -- but we don't fight wars in heaven! No, crossing the Jordan represents our salvation, our entering God's rest, as the author of Hebrews would put it, our salvation while we are still on earth. The land, then, represents our inheritance -- God's promise to us. With that in mind, think of the year of Jubilee. While in this life, do our sins have an impact on our lives and the lives of others? Do we suffer because of our bad decisions, or because of natural disasters of one type or another? Yes, we certainly do! But the impact of all these sins, of all natural disasters is limited. There are no eternal consequences of our failures. The year of Jubilee pictures the security of our inheritance, the assurance that all our sufferings are temporary, that God has promised us an inheritance and while we may turn our backs on it for a while, or cause ourselves and our families pain because of bad decisions, in the end our inheritance is secure. Just so, others may fail me, others may hurt me, but God's promise remains. So that is

why Jubilee is a celebration of liberty! We are free! Our lives are not controlled by others' bad decisions, or by our own bad decisions. Our destiny is in God's hands, the God who loves us and cherishes us. This also frees us to love. Nothing anyone else has done or will do to me can take away my inheritance. No one else can ruin my life. I am free to forgive, free to love, free to restore relationships. This is the promise of the Jubilee!

Conclusion Listen to these words of Peter:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

So, if you have received Jesus, if you have believed in His name, you are an heir. You need never feel like Jane Eyre, like you are a lonely wretch. You have an inheritance that can never perish, one guarded in heaven for you specifically. You are shielded by God's power until that last trumpet sounds, and we are changed into our new, glorious bodies. Your inheritance is beyond what you can imagine in riches, beyond what you can imagine in love. In this world you can sin and consequently lose some of the benefits of that inheritance for a time. You may cause yourself and those you love severe pain and sorrow. But Jubilee is coming! All is restored! That inheritance will never fade, but is guaranteed! And think of it! We will all sing together, not 150 of us, but 10,000 times 10,000, "Blessing and honor and glory and power forever and ever." We will praise the King, Your husband, the Master of the Universe and Redeemer of your life! The one who gave his all for you, because of his great love . . . For You! Riches and Relations! Inheritance and love. So you can rest in Him, the source of all power. You have no need to worry about your position -- instead, you need to respond in gratitude to His love. You have no need to try to impress Him -- he knows your deepest faults, your secret sins, yet still chose you. You have no need to try to accomplish anything on your own, proving your worth; instead, accept the Sabbath-rest He offers, now, in this life. Discipline yourself, work hard -- but work hard to focus on Christ Jesus, living a life of active dependence on him.

Let us close with Isaiah's description of that glorious day:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer (or a topee!), And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. . . . 8 And a highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, But it will be for him who walks that way, And fools will not wander on it. 9 No lion will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, 10 And the ransomed of the LORD will return, And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isaiah 35:5-6; Isaiah 35:8-10)

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 3/7/99. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him.

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## 02.01. An Hour of Prayer

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Twenty-Four Hours of Prayer A Suggested Format for A New Year's Prayer Vigil GENERAL SUGGESTIONS:

Feel free to structure your prayer any way that you wish. The following are simply suggestions which may be of some help:

If you want to look into the subject of prayer prior to your hour-long session, consider these sermons: Perseverance in Prayer and Steps to Effective Prayer.

Divide your prayer into four sections: PRAISE, CONFESSION, THANKS, and INTERCESSION.

Pray aloud if alone, or if everyone in the prayer room agrees to pray together.

**PRAISE GOD:** (about 10 minutes) For his creative powers; For his attributes: He is holy, just, loving, faithful, unchanging. For his redeeming love; for this time of year when we remember the gift of his son, when we remember his humbling himself to the point of death on a cross.

Read some sections of the Bible as part of your praise, such as Psalms 19:1-14, Psalms 47:1-9, Psalms 66:1-20, Psalms 100:1-5, Psalms 103:1-22, Psalms 104:1-35, Luke 1:46-55;

Sing a praise song or hymn.

**CONFESS SINS:** (about 10 minutes) Confession is agreeing with the God you have just praised that sin is sinful.

Confess your own sins -- be specific!

(If praying with others, you may want to agree to conduct this section silently) Reading Psalms 51:1-19 would be a good beginning.

Include in your confession:

Sins of commission: greed, jealousy, pride, self-righteousness, lust, sexual sins, gossip, murmuring, disobeying authority, stealing (from the government, from the office, from the church, from businesses), hatred, callousness, lack of self-control, hurtful words, idolatry (putting anything before God), misuse of alcohol, others;

Sins against: Your spouse, your parents, your grandparents, your brothers, your sisters, your children, your grandchildren, your fellow believers, your fellow workers, your girlfriend/boyfriend, your teachers, your pastor, your friends, your neighbors, others;

Sins of omission: Not caring enough: to pray, to give of your time, to give of your money, to give of yourself, to visit, to reach out; Not depending on God: to help you through temptation, to lead you in your decision-making, to develop your spiritual gifts;

Sins of groups to which you belong: Your church, your denomination, your profession, your race, your country.

Psalms 32:1-11, Daniel 9:4-19, and Nehemiah 1:5-11 may be appropriate for reading or paraphrasing as part of your prayer at this point.

#### INTERLUDE

You may want to take five minutes of silence at this point, reflecting on what you have said. You have praised God for who He is, and have confessed your own unworthiness. Meditate on the wonder and mystery of 1 John 1:9 : "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

**GIVE THANKS TO GOD:** (about 10 minutes) For God's forgiveness; For his great sacrifice for our sins; For what he has done for you in this last year; For what he will do for you in the coming year; For the natural beauty of our world; For our church; For its growth in the last year (thank God for individuals by name); For individuals within the church who have taught you, loved you, reached out to you, disciplined you, or rebuked you; For the pastor, elders, and other leaders; For the Sunday School; For the various ministries of the church; For your family; For health; For the trials you have faced this last year, and will face next year; For those in authority over you: your parents, your husband, your employer, government officials; For the abundance of material blessings you have received; For other items.

**INTERCESSION:** (about 20 minutes) For Others: For our church: That God's Word would be taught effectively and powerfully; That many individuals would receive Christ this year through the ministries of our members; That each individual member (name some!) would desire to serve the Lord God with all his heart, allowing God to develop his spiritual gift(s); That we will exhibit Christ's love for each other in our thoughts, words, and deeds; That whatever differences we have would be reconciled by God, and we would be become one through His redeeming power. For our Pastor: That he would preach the Word, reproving, rebuking, and encouraging us with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-22 -- you may wish to read all of 2 Timothy 4:2-5 as a prayer for the pastor). That he would live a life worthy of his calling, being an example to the flock. For our all leaders in the church: That they would be diligent in responding to the needs of their families, giving of themselves; That they would "keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience"; (1 Timothy 3:9) For all those who suffer physical and emotional problems in our church (name them!); For Christian missions and missionaries we support: In our own community; In the metropolitan area; In the U.S.

Around the world; For the hungry, poor, and oppressed: In this country; In the Indian sub-continent, where so many people are walking in darkness, where millions of people will be suffering from hunger next year if the present drought continues, and where the workers are so few; In communist countries; In other parts of the world. For your family, neighbors, others. For God's Kingdom

Pray that God's kingdom will come, that His will may be done in earth as in heaven. Consider the implications of this phrase that so often rolls off our lips, and elaborate on it. For Yourself

**CLOSING** (about 5 minutes) You may want to sing another song of praise, or spend another few minutes in silence.

You may use the following to close:

I pray that out of Your glorious riches You may strengthen me with power through Your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge -- that I may be filled with the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:16-21, modified)

If you wish, you may take this guide with you. If this is the last copy, please leave it but write your name here and we will get a copy to you.

Thank you so much for participating.

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## 02.02. Perseverance in Prayer

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Perseverance in Prayer A sermon on Ephesians 6:18-24 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, Feb. 22, 1998 Do you spend time praying? Why? What is the purpose of prayer? Do you pray in order to change the mind of an unchangeable God, a God who is outside time? Or do you pray like Aladdin to the genie in the bottle, thinking that God will grant you 3 wishes? Or did you try that, and the wishes didn't come true, so now you pray out of obedience but you don't understand why? Does prayer work? Is anything accomplished through prayer, is anything changed by you or me getting on our knees and talking to God? If God is really outside time, if he is the Eternal One who created time, if he is sovereign over all creation, then why pray?

I believe every Christian struggles with some of these questions at times. Each one of us has deeply desired something -- the salvation of a loved one, victory over persistent sin, the healing of a sick person, revival in our country, the end of the reign of an oppressive dictator -- we've deeply desired something, prayed earnestly for it, and seen . . . nothing. This is a common experience of Christians, and I am certain that some here this morning are feeling: "I've tried and tried to pray; I've tried to be like that persistent widow knocking on the door of the unjust judge -- and I don't see results. Why keep trying?"

We've now reached the end of the book of Ephesians. Paul ends this most glorious book -- this book which has been called the most sublime expression of Christian teaching -- with a call to prayer. And in these few verses, in the context of the entire book, he answers some of these questions. Please turn in your Bibles with me to Ephesians 6:1-24; we will begin reading with the 10th verse and read through the end of the book:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual [forces] of wickedness in the heavenly [places.] 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH,** and **HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,** 15 and having shod **YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;** 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil [one.] 17 And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION,** and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 With all types of prayer and petition pray in every season in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and [pray] on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in [proclaiming] it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. 21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and

that he may comfort your hearts. 23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible [love]. In these verses Paul gives us at least 7 lessons for effective prayer, for prayer that works. This morning I can't give you an exposition of all seven: Join us in Sunday School and next week <prayrtyp.htm> when we will talk more about these lessons and then have a "lab time," a time when we will put these lessons into practice. In this sermon, I will mention all seven, and focus our time more on a subset of these. Then, we'll return to the question: Does prayer work? Before that, let us assume that the answer to the question is "Yes," and pray to our Lord. Our Lord and Savior, you know that Satan loves to assail us with doubts about the efficacy of prayer. You know that your enemy tries to deceive us, to make us think that prayer is a waste of time. Thank you for these words of Paul, these words which you inspired, exhorting us to be devoted to prayer. Open our ears this morning, and my mouth, and may you fill us with your Spirit so that we might have insight into this most important teaching. In Jesus name, Amen.

### Seven Lessons for Effective Prayer

First, Effective prayer follows putting on the armor of God. In verse 10 Paul tells us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. He then instructs us to put on the full armor of God, and tells us about that armor in verses 11-17. Remember, putting on the armor consists of turning our thoughts to God and the truths of our position before Him: He has given us His truth, which is completely trustworthy; we are the righteousness of Christ, and thus can never be condemned; God has granted us his peace, peace between us and God, peace between man and man. Then we are to take up the shield of faith, our confidence in what we cannot see, so that we are not fooled by appearances. And we are to take up the helmet of the hope of salvation, knowing that we are predestined to be glorified in the presence of Christ. And finally we are to take up the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, as God makes particular parts of his word come alive for us just when we need them.

Putting on the armor of God allows us to see the world as it really is. The world around us is full of deceit and lies. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:7 to walk by faith not by sight, not by appearances. True reality is invisible to us; putting on the armor allows us to see things as they really are. If we don't first put on the armor, we will pray out of misconceptions concerning the nature of reality, who we are, and who God is.

Furthermore, if we jump into prayer without first turning our thoughts to these truths, we are not protected against Satan's attacks. Our initial turning to God in prayer causes an alarm to sound in Satan's headquarters -- he will do anything possible to keep us from praying. So as soon as we turn to God, Satan frequently attacks in any way possible. We are most in need of the armor when we begin to pray. So effective prayer requires first putting on the armor

Second, Effective prayer includes all types of prayer. Paul says we are to pray "with ALL prayer" in Ephesians 6:18. The Greek word used can mean "all" or "all types," and I believe it means the latter here. There are many ways to pray, many types of prayer. Our prayer should not be the same or even of the same form each day. In this verse, Paul brings out two types, translated here as "prayer and petition." The first concerns honoring God, bowing in reverence before him, worshipping him. The second consists of our requests, both for ourselves and for others. Our prayer life can be enriched by consciously using different types. It is easy for us to go to God with a

grocery list of wrongs we want righted, sicknesses we want healed, and gifts we desire. Now, God tells us to present our requests, our petitions to him. But we must concentrate on broadening our prayers, so that we come to know God better, so that our hearts desire what God's heart desires. One method I have found profitable is praying the Scriptures: taking a passage of Scripture and praying it aloud. In some cases, this can be using only the words of Scripture, in other cases making them pertain to myself or another individual. The whole book of Ephesians is rich ground to be used as prayer; stay for Sunday School and have an opportunity to pray through parts of this book. Another method of prayer is to focus on one attribute or characteristic of God, thanking Him for manifesting himself in this way, thinking about how he has shown himself throughout history in this way. So I encourage you: pray with all types of prayer.

Third, Effective prayer is offered in every season, at all times. Paul here uses the same word for "all." The emphasis in this phrase is not that we should pray continually -- that comes later! -- but that prayer is appropriate at ALL TYPES of times or seasons. We need to pray in the good times, and the bad times; in times of tragedy, and times of rejoicing; in times of accomplishment, and times of failure; at times when we feel close to God, and at times when we feel God has let us down, when we can't even sense His presence. We need to pray at all types of times. So effective prayer follows putting on the armor, effective prayer includes all types of prayer, effective prayer is offered in every season of our lives, and, fourthly:

Effective prayer is prayer in the Spirit.

There are a variety of interpretations offered to the phrase "pray in the Spirit." Note that the construction in Greek is the same as in Ephesians 6:10, where Paul writes "Be strong IN THE LORD and IN THE STRENGTH of His might." In Ephesians 6:10 Paul is not suggesting that there are different ways to be strong; rather, he is explaining the only way we can truly be strong, the only way we can fight successfully our spiritual battles. Also, recall John chapter 4 where Jesus is speaking to the woman at the well. As Jesus begins to get personal, she tries to divert the discussion to more impersonal religion: Which mountain is the appropriate one for worship, Gerazim or Jerusalem? As part of his reply, Jesus states, God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)

Again, this is the same word, the same construction as in Ephesians 6:18. Here, too, Jesus is saying the only true worship is done in spirit and truth.

Just so, in Ephesians 6:18 Paul is not suggesting that there are two types of effective prayer, prayer in the spirit and prayer not in the spirit. Rather, he stresses that we cannot pray effectively in our own power; vain repetitions, many words are not necessarily effective prayer; lots of emotion does not make for effective prayer; the absence of emotion does not lead to effective prayer, loud calling out does not lead to effective prayer; elegant writing does not lead to effective prayer. Instead, effective prayer results from an active dependence on the Spirit within us, as we acknowledge that we don't know how to pray, as we open ourselves to His leading and His prompting.

Ephesians 6:18 continues: with all types of prayer and petition, pray at all seasons in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. So fifth, Effective prayer is the result of being watchful and alert. The word used here literally means

"sleepless," or "not drowsy." Have any of you fallen asleep in prayer? I have, and I'm sure many of you have too. In fact, some of you are sleeping right now while I speak!

Paul here returns to a military image. Consider this: A war is going on, and you are on guard duty. What is your responsibility? If you stay awake for the first 30 minutes of your stint, but then get drowsy, and allow your head to droop, you are not a very effective sentry! No. Don't sleep! Don't allow yourself to doze! Don't neglect to keep your eyes peeled! You don't know when or where the enemy will attack, and the army is depending on you to be its eyes and ears.

Note that we are to stay on the alert "for all the saints." We are guarding others.

We can imagine now that we are not just individual enlisted men battling in the front lines, but a Brigadier General, in charge of a brigade of troops. We are on the alert; when we hear of an enemy attack, we shift resources to assist the beleaguered point of the line; when we notice a thin point in our defense, we send reinforcements to shore up its strength. If we know that one unit is weary from battle, we relieve them, and give them rest. A good general is always watchful, always alert, always looking to send extra help to those units that need relief. This is the responsibility of ALL of us, as the author of the book of Hebrews makes clear. Hebrews 3:12-13 is one of my favorite passages in this regard. Here is my paraphrase:

ALL of you see to it, brothers, that not one of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But all of you encourage each one of you daily, so that not one of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

We have a JOINT RESPONSIBILITY for every member of the body of Christ. As Paul has made clear earlier in Ephesians, we are the body, we need each other, and each of us needs to do his part if the body is to prosper fully. And doing our part includes watching, and then PRAYING.

Sixth, Effective prayer is perseverant. Paul says, "be on the alert with all perseverance." As we mentioned earlier, a watchman is not very effective if he watches for 30 minutes and then dozes off. A watchman must be devoted to his task, being alert, staying awake, until he is relieved by another. Furthermore, the general sending aid to beleaguered troops must continue the process until defenses are strong; if he sends insufficient aid, both the original troops and the reinforcements will be overrun. Just so, we must persevere in prayer.

There are at least two words translated "perseverance" in the New Testament, and these two words have quite different connotations. The first and most common word means to hold up under pressure. There is a heavy weight bearing down on you, and you must hold up under it. This is the word used, for example, in Hebrews 12:1 :

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

There is a difficult task ahead of us, and we must endure, we must continue through the difficulty. That is not the word used for being perseverant in prayer. This word, instead, means to serve constantly. It is used, for example, in Acts 10:1-48, where Luke tells us that the Roman centurion Cornelius had soldiers who "persevered" with him -- they waited on him constantly, were devoted to him, were anticipating his needs and trying to meet those needs even before he asked. This word is very frequently used in conjunction with prayer in the New Testament. Indeed, in Romans 12:12 both words for perseverance are used: rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted

to prayer,

We are to hold up under the pressures of tribulation, but we are to be devoted to, to persevere in prayer. Both words connote continuing over a long period of time -- the difference is that prayer is seen not as a burden that must be endured but as a form of service. So the idea of being perseverant in prayer goes along with being alert: we are watching, we are aware of what is going on, and then we DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. We watch -- and then act. Prayer is the action that results from watching.

Finally, Effective prayer is in accord with God's promises and gifts.

Look now at Paul's request to the Ephesians in Ephesians 6:19-20 : and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Paul is in prison. But what does he ask for? Not to be released from prison; not to be made more comfortable. Now, he does later say that he is sending Tychicus to them so that they may know all about him, and I'm sure that Tychicus related the difficulties facing Paul. But those are not Paul's primary concern, not his primary prayer request. When you ask someone to pray for you, what do you ask for? Paul asks that he might fulfill his commission, that he might use his spiritual gifts effectively. Such prayer will always be answered positively! But furthermore, note that Paul didn't rest on the fact that God had commissioned him, or that God had gifted him. He sought out prayer, because God chooses to work through our prayers. This brings us back to the question, Does prayer work? We have seen that effective prayer follows putting on the armor of God, it is of all types, for all seasons, it should be in the Spirit, it is alert and watchful, it perseveres, and it is in accord with God's promises. But does prayer work?

Prayer is our active dependence on God, our turning to Him, acknowledging that we need him, reminding ourselves of the truths of his word that appearances around us seem to belie. When we pray we are reminded of who God is, of what He has done, of what He will do, of what He has promised. We are reminded that God is faithful. We can know that God will fulfill His promises in our lives and the lives of others

We frequently hear the expression: "Prayer doesn't change God; prayer changes us." Prayer DOES change us; that is one important reason for prayer. We only need to look at the Psalms to see this. In so many Psalms, the author begins in a terrible state of mind: discouraged, depressed, overwhelmed by his circumstances. But during the course of prayer, the circumstances do not change but the Psalmist's attitude changes. By reminding ourselves of who God is, and his past actions, prayer changes us -- for the better. But the danger in using this expression is that we may think that the only outcome of prayer is the change within. While prayer does not change an unchanging God, prayer changes the world around us. God has ordained that he will work through our prayers.

How does God work through prayer? While we can never fully understand this, fundamentally it is no different than the way God works through any of our actions. God works through prayer in exactly the same way that he works through preaching, or witnessing, or our exercising our spiritual gifts. On our own, under our own power, we can accomplish nothing of eternal

significance. But God chooses to work through us, so that when we step out under His power, He accomplished great things.

Remember when God told Ezekiel to preach to a valley of dead bones? What happened? The bones joined together, began dancing around, and flesh grew on the bones, and the people responded to the preaching! Now, did Ezekiel's preaching cause those bones to come together? Think about that. The answer is Yes: God chose to work through the obedience of His prophet to cause the bones to come together. Ezekiel could not go to any graveyard and begin speaking and see bones come together; but when speaking in obedience to God's command, Ezekiel's preaching led to the response of people who were dead. In just the same way, God CHOOSES to use us as his instruments in accomplishing his purposes. He chooses to allow us to participate in the exercise of his power, through our prayers. So does prayer change God? NO! Is there such a thing as effective prayer? YES! So I encourage you: PRAY. Pray through the Scriptures, pray in praise to God, thanking him, recalling his great deeds as recorded in the Bible and in church history -- and as you pray you will be changed. Pray for us, your elders, and we will be empowered and changed. Pray for your children, your friends, think of yourself as the general who has access to reinforcements to send to whoever needs them. Be on the alert! Know who needs help, and do what is most effective: Pray.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 2/22/98.

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## 02.03. Steps to Effective Prayer

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Steps to Effective Prayer A Sermon by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, Jan. 1, 1998 Please turn in your Bibles with me to Ephesians 6:18; we will read Ephesians 6:18-20 :

18 With all types of prayer and petition pray in every season in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and [pray] on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in [proclaiming] it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (NAS)

Last week: we asked the question, "Does prayer work? Does prayer make any difference?" We noted that prayer works in at least two ways: First of all, prayer changes us. As we pray, as we turn our thoughts toward God -- his power, his majesty, his faithfulness, his accomplishments -- our perspective changes. So that as we pray, God joins our heart to his, he gives us grace to help in our time of need, he changes our thoughts and our attitudes. In addition, prayer changes the world around us, not because our prayers change God, but because God has ordained that he will work through our prayers. And I suggested that the way God works through prayer is not fundamentally different from the way God works through preaching, or witnessing, or service: in each case, we could accomplish nothing unless the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of those we serve. So what kind of prayer works? As we thought about these words of Paul, we noted that this passage provides us with seven lessons for effective prayer, seven lessons that we need to take to heart if our prayers are to work.

Put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17) before you pray;

Use all types of prayer -- especially, I encouraged you to pray through the Scriptures;

Pray at all times, in all seasons of your life;

Pray in the Spirit; Be watchful and alert, looking out for each other; Be perseverant, be devoted to prayer;

Pray in accord with God's promises and gifts. This morning, we will elaborate on these lessons for effective prayer, particularly the second: using all types of prayer. I'll mention seven types of prayer that we might use. In addition, we'll discuss using all four parts of prayer: Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and petition. Like last week, some of these points I will emphasize while others only mention; please note them all down, and try to put them into practice this week. So let us begin by examining our use of the four parts of prayer.

### (1) USE ALL PARTS OF PRAYER

Many of us have profited from using the acronym ACTS for the parts of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (or, as I prefer, Petition -- but ACTP is hard to

pronounce!). Let us consider these in turn:

### Adoration

I well remember my first week teaching secondary school in Kenya in 1977. My 2nd or 3rd day at the school, I had some business with the headmaster. I walked into his office, saw that he was busy, so just blurted out my request for additional math books for my students. The headmaster looked slightly pained, then asked me, "So how are you this morning? Are you settling in well? And your parents, have you heard from your parents? How are they?"

Those questions were a polite reprimand to me. You see, in most of Africa it is exceptionally rude to make a request of a person as soon as you enter their presence. You must first greet the person, ask about their family and children (and their grandparents and their neighbors!) and only after all these preliminaries make any request. The idea behind this custom is that the two of you have a relationship, and that relationship is more important than any use you might have for each other. You care about each other, you are concerned for each other first and foremost. Once you have established that through your greeting, then you can make a request. Our prayers should follow a similar custom. We should not approach God immediately making requests, but our prayers should begin with adoration and praise. This pattern is apparent in the Bible. Indeed, almost every one of the prayers of great men of faith recorded in the Bible begins with invocation. For example:

When Daniel prays to God out of concern for his nation, he begins: Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments

When Hezekiah confronts the likely destruction of his nation, as the most powerful military force in the world is about to attack, he begins his prayer: O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

These prayers do not have 10 minute long invocations. But they do begin by acknowledging who God is, they begin by reminding the speaker of some of the characteristics of the God whom we address. They also, like the African custom, establish the relationship between the speaker and God. Our prayers should do the same.

Although all our prayers should begin with adoration, at times we should focus longer prayers solely on adoring the God who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. These prayers may focus on one characteristic of God, such as:

His faithfulness -- think of God's revelation of his faithfulness as recorded in the Bible, and then of examples in biblical history, national history, and your personal history;

His creative power -- think through the mighty power of God as evidenced by his creation. My oldest son, Jonathan, gave me a good example of this last week: Given present estimates, if all the stars were divided up among all the people on earth, how many stars do you think each of us would receive? Ten? A hundred? No: Two Trillion. Two trillion stars for every man, woman, and child. That is the kind of God we have -- a God of unimaginable power, a God who has created unimaginable wealth.

## Confession

Let us now briefly consider confession. When we praise God, we are remembering who God is; when we confess, we are remembering who we are, how weak we are; we are agreeing with God concerning his statements about our actions. Our confession should first and foremost include acknowledging our specific failures to live a life worthy of our calling. But there are two other aspects of confession I would like to point out:

**Group confession:** In addition to our personal sins, we need to confess sins committed by groups with which we are identified. If you continue reading Daniel's prayer, you find that he is confessing the sins of the Jewish people, even though he was not personally guilty of those sins. We too need to be cognizant of the sins committed by our families, our nation, our race, our church.

Second, while most confession has to do with sin, we also need to confess before God our inability to accomplish anything without him, our lack of power to accomplish anything of eternal significance. This, again, is agreeing with God concerning his statements about us, and thus is logically a part of confession.

**Thanksgiving:** The third part of prayer is thanksgiving. Here, we usually think of the blessings God has given us: our salvation, our families, our friends, our material possessions, etc. And, of course, we should thank God for all of these. But according to the Bible we should also thank God for the trials and difficulties we face. Remember the beginning of the book of James:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4, NAS)

Consider it all joy, or "pure joy" as some translations put it, when you face trials. Do you consider trials to be a joy? James is not saying here that we should jump up and down, saying, "Oh, Goody! A Trial!" Rather, he is saying that we should have a quiet confidence that God will use these trials for our benefit, and the benefit of others who see us encounter trials with this attitude. Anyone can be thankful and joyful when things are going well; when we are thankful and joyful even in the midst of trials and difficulties, we stand out from the world around us, we are letting our light shine.

Let me challenge you: Commit yourself right now to thanking God for the next five disagreeable things that happen to you. And let me know how it goes . . .

**Petition** The last part of prayer is petition. Most of our prayers are dominated by petition; we don't need a lot of instruction concerning this form of prayer. But let me make three suggestions for you to keep in mind concerning your prayers of petition:

First, acknowledge that "No" is the best answer for some of our petitions. Amy Carmichael, who spent over fifty years as a missionary to India, told the story of her earliest memory. Amy's mother taught her about prayer when she was three. And Amy believed with a child's simple faith that all her prayers would be answered. Now, the desire of her heart was to have beautiful blue eyes instead of her own deep brown eyes. So she prayed one night, "Oh, Lord, please, make my eyes blue tonight!" And she went to sleep with full confidence that her eyes would be blue in the morning. When she woke up, she immediately ran to the mirror to look at her pretty blue eyes. She looked -- and was devastated. God had let her down.

Now, in many cases we never know why God says, "No." But sometimes we find out. Amy believed in her later years that she knew why she had to have a dark complexion and the accompanying brown eyes. In India, she was able to dress like the locals and walk through the city streets without calling attention to herself. That would have been impossible had she been blonde-headed and blue-eyed. So when we get no for an answer, we should thank God, and believe that he is working all things together for the good of those who love him.

Second, we can be confident that the answer will be "Yes" if our petitions are based on the promises of God. This is why Scripture prayers can be so effective -- we are basing our requests on God's explicit promises. Now, it is ok to pray for cares for which we have no specific promises -- we are instructed to take our concerns to God, whatever they may be. For those requests, however, we need to be ready to acknowledge no for an answer. But when we pray based on a specific promise, we can KNOW that God will answer in the affirmative. For example, when we are suffering through a trial, we can pray that God would use this testing of our faith to produce endurance in us, to perfect us, to make us complete, so that we would become like him. And we can know that God will do so.

Finally, our petitions should include asking that God would be recognized as holy and just, praying that God's will would be done in this world and that the world would acknowledge him. This, of course, is part of the Lord's Prayer: "hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" -- but how often do we pray about this topic other than when we recite that prayer? I encourage you to include this most important petition in your prayers this week. So we have considered Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Petition. I encourage you to use all of the parts of prayer. Now let us turn our thoughts to different types of prayer.

(2) USE ALL TYPES OF PRAYER I will mention seven types of prayer, discussing only the first in any detail.

(a) Pray through the Scriptures As we mentioned last week, praying by using the Scriptures is an important step toward effective prayer. There are at least three reasons for this:

First, to learn how to praise God. Praise is usually the weakest part of our prayers. Asking God for things we think we need is relatively easy. We may not like to confess our sins, but we can always think of what we have done wrong. And we may not have a thankful heart, but with some reflection we can readily think of things for which we should thank God. But praise is more difficult for most of us. The Bible is full of wonderful examples of praise; praying through these examples serves as effective praise while we do it, and teaches us how to praise God when we don't have a Bible in front of us.

Second, using Scripture gives us examples of how to pray for others. Last week in Sunday School we used Paul's prayers in Ephesians 1:1-23; Ephesians 3:1-21 to pray for others -- this is a particularly powerful way to pray.

Third, God speaks to us through his written word. By praying through the Scriptures, by knowing the Scriptures and having them right on our lips, we put ourselves in a position to hear God as he speaks through his word.

There are different ways that we can use the Scriptures in our prayers. We can simply read a passage prayerfully. Alternately, we can change the pronouns or the names so that the Scripture is specifically relevant for the case we are concerned about. Third, we can use the Scripture as a starting point, and elaborate on the points brought out as we pray.

Let us actually do that now. I would like us to pray together using Psalms 23:1-6 as the base. I will pray, and expand on the thoughts in the passage:

O Lord, my shepherd, our guide, our protector: Because we belong to you, we will never lack anything we need. Lord, help us to believe this and act upon it when the circumstances of our lives seem to indicate otherwise. My Shepherd, you make us lie down in green pastures, in places of abundant nourishment; you provide us with safe and quiet places to rest, so that we might be restored. Thank you, Lord, for guiding us in your paths of righteousness. Lord, without your guidance we would constantly be losing the path. Keep us on your paths, O Lord. Father, here is a mystery: we can ask "For your name's sake!" Lord, thank you that you choose to glorify your name through such weak and unworthy vessels as those of us worshiping you here this morning.

Lord you are our shepherd even when -- especially when -- we are in frightening situations, when it appears that everything we depend upon is falling apart. But Lord, we will not fear if we draw close to you, if we acknowledge that you are with us, armed to defend us from every evil attack and equipped to keep us on the path. Your discipline and protection comfort us, O Lord.

Lord, we know that you will honor us in front of those who have opposed us, that you will lift us up and exalt us, providing us with riches that we cannot imagine and do not deserve. You have given us a foretaste of this by the gift of your Spirit, as you have anointed us; the riches that you give us are worth more than we can imagine; we have a superabundance of good things. Our shepherd, your goodness and your lovingkindness, your covenant love, will follow us and accompany us every minute of every day of this life on earth. And, praise you my Lord, each person here who knows you as Savior and Lord will delight in you for all eternity in your presence. Thank you, our Father. Amen.

I heartily commend this form of prayer to you. Commit yourself to taking a block of time and praying ONLY this way. I believe it will open the Scriptures to you, help you to hear God, and make your other prayers that much more effective.

#### (b) Pray through the Writings of Others

While the Scriptures are the best tool to use in our prayers, other writings by Christians can be helpful also. In the book *A Life of Prayer* Edith Schaeffer gives numerous examples of her own use of the Scriptures for prayer, along with examples of prayers of other Christians that she has used. Using such prayers once a week or so can help us to get out of the rut of offering similar prayers every day.

One resource that I have found helpful as a prayer-starter is the small book by Pamela Reeve entitled *Faith Is . . .*. The author meditates on the meaning of faith, offering dozens of one sentence definitions. Here are some of them:

Faith is cooperating with God in changing me rather than taking refuge in piously berating myself.

Faith is refusing to feel guilty over past confessed sin, when God, the Judge, has sovereignly declared me pardoned.

Faith is accepting the ordinary as God's best for me when I want to be special.

Faith is accepting the truth that despite the wreckage I've caused and grieved over, God who has wiped the slate clean delights in me.

Faith is having the confidence that God will take the bad choices others have made that affect me and use them for my ultimate good.

Faith is taking my eyes off my good self, or my bad self, or my wounded self, and keeping them on Himself.

Taking one of these sentences, meditating on it, and praying to God concerning our own need for this type of faith can be deeply rewarding. We can also pray for others to have this type of faith. I commend that to you.

(c) Pray out loud Has your mind ever wandered while praying? You are saying in your mind, "Oh, God, I praise you for your mercy and your lovingkindness . . . now how did the Celtics blow that game last night? I just don't understand how professional basketball players . . . Oh, Lord, sorry, I praise you . . ."

God is the only person we try to address in our heads; we have little practice in speaking this way, making it is easy to lose focus. Silent prayers are often appropriate when we are in the presence of others, but when alone I suggest that you pray aloud. One author has stated, "Praying out loud controls 90% of mind wandering." I do not believe that Daniel would have prayed what is recorded for us in Daniel 9:1-27 silently; though he was alone at the time, this is a spoken prayer. So I encourage you this week to try saying all your solitary prayers out loud.

(d) Write your prayers

Daniel eventually wrote down his prayer in Daniel 9:1-27. I have been writing many of my prayers for the last three years, and I would have to say that this is the single most helpful change in my prayer life. Now, I write professionally, so when I am positioned in front of a computer with my hands on the keyboard, it is natural for me to be focussed on my work. I think simply assuming the position is helpful to me, in keeping me from allowing my mind to wander. In addition, I have found that writing especially helps my praise time. Typing slows me down just enough that I can't simply rattle off fifteen attributes of God in a few seconds and go on to another part of prayer. In his book *Too Busy Not to Pray*, Bill Hybels suggests writing your prayers and then reading them aloud. I rarely do this, praying instead as I type. Try it both ways at least once this week, and see how this affects your prayer time.

(e) Offer songs as prayers

Singing during a prayer time can be quite effective, especially as a form of praise. And there is clear biblical precedence, as the Psalms and other parts of the Old Testament (such as Habakkuk 3:1-19) were originally written to be sung. Make use of the praise songs we sing in church, make use of hymns, offer up your own creations. Your voice doesn't have to be good, and your songs

don't have to be great pieces of music. God is delighted when our hearts are turned to him in prayer, and singing adds another dimension to our prayer life that is especially helpful at turning our hearts to him. In addition, singing as part of a performance of a great work of Christian music can be a deeply prayerful experience. Many of you know that God turned my life around while we were living in Kenya in the early 1980's. During the fall of 1984 I was practicing Handel's Messiah with the Nairobi Music Society, an excellent 100-voice choir. Unfortunately, the concert was to be performed on a Friday night, the very night of our departure for the States. Nevertheless, I participated in the practices all fall because of the joy of singing this great piece of music. In mid-November, the airline on which we were flying changed its flight schedule, forcing us to delay our departure until Saturday night -- and allowing me to spend my last night in Nairobi singing praises to God. For me, that night was incredibly meaningful -- feeling that God as a special gift had made the arrangements so that I could sing, thinking of all that He had accomplished during my three years in Kenya, and ending with the most glorious chorus ever written: "Worthy is the lamb that was slain and hath redeemed us to God by his blood to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing! Blessing and honor, glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the lamb forever and ever! Amen! Amen!" The entire 2 1/2 hour concert was one long prayer for me.

(f) Pray through your creativity In addition to praying through songs written by others, we can effectively pray to God through our own creative expressions. This can include our own musical compositions, our artwork, our writings -- praising God, bringing glory to him through our creativity can be one effective method of prayer. Clearly masterpieces bring glory to God, but our own songs written to express our thoughts to Him can also please Him, just as three-year-old Joel's music and drawings which he offers to me bring me pleasure.

(g) Pray through our excellent work

Finally, I would like to suggest that we also effectively praise God when we honor him through excelling in areas in which he has gifted us. This can be in our ministry, in our work -- as Doug discussed a few weeks ago when preaching on the first part of Ephesians 6:5-9 -- or in athletic endeavors. One of my favorite expressions of this idea comes out in the Academy Award winning film, Chariots of Fire. The film tells the story of Eric Liddell, who won the 400 meters at the 1924 Olympic games. Eric was born in China, where his parents were missionaries, and knew he was called to missionary service in China. In the film, Eric's sister Jenny confronts him concerning the amount of time and energy he is expending on his running, as she suggests that he is forgetting his calling. Eric replies, "Jenny, I believe God made me for the purpose of serving in China, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure." When we work to the best of our abilities by God's power in whatever we do, when we give Him all the glory for whatever we accomplish, we are praising Him in a most effective way. And this also is a type of prayer.

**CONCLUSION** So in the last two weeks we have learned much about prayer. The question now is: What will you do? Will you put these truths into practice? In Psalms 27:1-14, David tells us that the Lord said to him, "Seek My face." And David's heart replied, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek." Seek his face! Will you seek the face of the Lord? My three-year-old Joel will sit on Beth's lap, reach up with his hands, put one on each of her cheeks, turn her face toward him, look dreamily into her eyes and say, "I wuv you Mommy." He seeks her face, he longs to stare one on one into

her eyes. We are to do the same with God.

God commands us to seek his face, and tells us that we cannot live the Christian life or experience true joy unless we do so. And he promises that persistence in prayer will change both us and the world around us. In Psalms 34:1-22 David writes, O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

We must taste in order to see, we must reach out to him in prayer -- regularly, persistently -- and then we will see that the Lord indeed is good. There is true joy to be found in tasting the Lord's goodness. So I hold out to you that promise of God: If you persevere in prayer, you WILL see that the Lord is good, you will see the impact on yourself and others of your prayer. But I warn you: it won't be easy. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer." We are in a war, and prayer is one of our most effective weapons. So Satan will fight us every step of the way. But because we are in a war, because the body of Christ depends on each one of us holding up our part of the front line, we need to strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees, we need to discipline ourselves so that we regularly, continually turn in active dependence to the Lord. So I encourage you: Taste and see that the Lord is good. Commit yourself to using at least one of these types of prayer today, and another this week; commit yourself to using all parts of prayer. Seek his face.

Let us pray: Our Lord and Father, you who have reached out to us and given us such great and precious promises, you have told us that we have the tremendous privilege of approaching your throne of grace boldly, with confidence because of the blood of Jesus shed for us. Our God, we confess that we have neglected to do so, that we have allowed the Enemy to divert us from this most important task. Lord, may we believe that you have ordained to work through prayer; may we then act on that belief even today. And may Community Bible Church become a community of believers who are devoted to prayer, so that we might be effective ambassadors for you in this hurting world.

24 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25, NAS)

Addendum added 5/28/01: Another suggestion for prayer, which God has used mightily in my life since I preached this sermon: Try to find an isolated spot that you really love, and regularly go there to pray. I fought this for many years: "I should be able to pray anywhere! I'm just giving in to weakness if I have to go some place special to pray effectively." But that thinking is wrongheaded. For I could say the same thing about my relationship with my wife, Beth: "We don't need to go anywhere special; if our relationship is good, we can talk fine at home." Of course we can talk fine at home. But our relationship benefits from regular special occasions when we go somewhere we both enjoy, and relate to each other in that special context. Just so, your relationship with God will benefit if you take the time to go some place you particularly enjoy (God enjoys all places!) and spend time with Him.

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 3/1/98.

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## 03.00. Revelation: A Study Guide

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Revelation: A Study Guide By Coty Pinckney

Welcome to our study of Revelation! Some people consider this book the most frightening in the Bible, others the most confusing. We will trust the Lord to hold to the promise he gives in Revelation 1:3 :

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it. This course is a book study of Revelation, not a commentary study. When studying this last book in the Bible, it is tempting at every confusing point to turn to the commentary or Study Bible notes to find the meaning. But note God's promise in Revelation 1:3 : It is to those who read and hear the words of the prophecy, not the words of the commentator. It is God's word which is sharper than any two-edged sword, not the words of a Bible scholar; it is the word of Christ that is to dwell in us richly, not the explanations of a particular theological school.

Yet Revelation is indeed a confusing book, and we can learn much from other godly readers. How can we study this book in such a way that we allow God to speak to us through His word, yet take advantage of the insights He has given to others? Our technique will be the same that I use whenever approaching a passage to teach or preach:

·First, encounter the text. Read it; examine the context; study its structure; compare this passage with others throughout the Bible. Highlight difficulties and challenges in the text, pray about them, and consider applications to your life and the lives of others.

·Then, and only then, examine explanatory notes, commentaries, sermons, and other resources. At this point, such resources can serve to help you understand the passage further; if you start with the commentary, however, you never encounter the Word yourself, and generally restrict yourself to the interpretation offered by the commentator. My role in this endeavor is to provide you not with an interpretation of the book but with questions that aid you in digging into the book yourself. Learning to ask good questions is the key to being able to study and teach the Bible effectively. I hope that these questions will help you learn how to generate insightful questions about other passages you study. The questions will refer you to passages elsewhere in Scripture to which Revelation alludes, or which cover similar material.

You will learn most if you write out answer to every question, and keep your answers in a computer file or notebook. For a serious learner, each lesson will take at least two hours, and probably closer to three hours. With twenty-seven lessons in total, understand ahead of time that this course will take considerable time to complete.

While for the most part this is a study of the English text of Revelation, this version makes several references to the Greek text of Revelation and the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (referred to as LXX). A student who knows no Greek could still use this guide profitably, skipping some questions, or could use an earlier and somewhat simpler version of this

study guide. As you undertake a serious study of this wonderful book, I encourage you to commit to memory portions of it. Here are some suggestions. Those of you who know some Greek would do well to memorize at least one or two of these verses in the original language: 3:14-22, 4:8-11, 5:1-14, 7:9-12, 21:1-8, 22:12,13,17. Pick verses that will be helpful to you personally, and then hold on to them for all your life.

References: After dealing with the text yourself, I will suggest that you turn to two commentaries:

- Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened*, Intervarsity Press, 1975.
- Ray Stedman, *God's Final Word: Understanding Revelation*, Discovery House Press, 1991.

We use these commentaries for several reasons: they approach the book in markedly different ways; they argue strongly for their own interpretation, while not dismissing other interpretations in a cavalier or dogmatic manner; they are written by men who are dedicated to letting the Word itself speak to us; they draw out implications for believers today from every passage. Both treatments are non-technical, Stedman's especially so, since his book originated as a sermon series. Stedman's original sermons are available at <[www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/revelation](http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/revelation)>, and, if you wish, you read his input there instead of in the book. The lessons, however, refer to page and chapter numbers in the book.

I pray that you will find this study spiritually enriching, intellectually challenging, and emotionally inspiring. By the time we finish, all of us will be better prepared to say with John, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!"

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## 03.01. Lesson 01

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Lesson 1: Read the entire book of Revelation at least twice. One of these times -- preferably the first -- read the entire book in one sitting. Do not look at any explanatory notes or commentaries at this stage. If you can't resist looking at your Bible's footnotes, use a Bible without footnotes!

Study Questions:

- (1) From your reading of the entire book, pick out three to five central themes. What is God telling us here?
- (2) With these readings fresh in your mind, how would you characterize the tone of the book? I've noted that some find it frightening or confusing; what words would you use?
- (3) What are some key verses you have read, those that seem to stand out to you? These may relate to the themes you've highlighted, but they could also be single verses that burn in your memory.
- (4) How would you outline the book? Don't go into great detail here, but try to pick out 5-10 major sections. Ignore chapter breaks as much as possible.
- (5) After doing the reading, what are the major questions you have about this book? What do you want to be sure to cover in the weeks ahead?

Commentaries:

Read the Preface and Introduction to Wilcock (pages 11-12, 19-25), and pages 1-6 (until he quotes Revelation 1:4) of Stedman. Revise your answers to the questions above in light of this reading.

## 03.02. Lesson 02

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Lesson 2: Read Revelation 1:1-20 at least 3 times, avoiding reference to any commentaries or notes.

Now consider the following Old Testament passages, comparing them to what you just read in Revelation:

Ezekiel 1:26-28; Ezekiel 43:1-5; Daniel 2:29-30; Daniel 2:45; Daniel 7:9-14; Daniel 10:5-10, Zechariah 4:2-7. Also read Mark 9:1-8.

Look up several of the other allusions made in this chapter to the Old Testament:

Revelation 1:5 to Psalms 89:27, Psalms 89:37 Revelation 1:6 to Exodus 19:6

Revelation 1:7 to Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10 (see also Matthew 24:30)

Revelation 1:8 to Isaiah 44:6

Revelation 1:13 to Exodus 28:6-8

Revelation 1:16 to Isaiah 11:4; Isaiah 49:2; Isaiah 60:19-20

Revelation 1:18 to Isaiah 22:22 Study Questions:

(1) Compare Revelation 1:1 with the verses cited above from Daniel 2:1-49. What is the context in Daniel? What phrases are similar in Revelation 1:1 and Daniel 2:1-49? What differences are there? Look at the English first, then the Greek. The LXX for these verses in Daniel reads in part, avlIV e;sti qeo.j evn ouvranw/| avnakalu,ptwn musth,ria ojj evdh,lwse tw/| basilei/ Naboucodosor a] dei/ gene,sqai evpV evsca,twn tw/n h`merw/n . . . 29 su, basileu/ katakliqei.j evpi. th/j koi,thj sou e`w,rakaj pa,nta o[sa dei/ gene,sqai evpV evsca,twn tw/n h`merw/n kai. o` avnakalu,ptwn musth,ria evdh,lwse, soi a] dei/ gene,sqai

(2) The last phrase of verse 1 in the KJV reads, "He sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John" What is the Greek word translated "signified"? How does the NIV translate this? How does John use this verb and the noun from which it is derived elsewhere? (see John 12:33; John 18:32; John 21:19 for the verb (elsewhere in NT this verb only appears in Acts 11:28; Acts 25:27). The noun appears 69 times in the NT; in Revelation it is used in the following verses: Revelation 12:1, Revelation 12:3, Revelation 13:13-14, Revelation 15:1, Revelation 16:14,, and Revelation 19:20. It appears 17 other times in John's writings; for examples see John 2:11; John 20:30. All other references in John have the same meaning. What does this word tell us about the nature of the rest of the book?

(3) Who is the one "who is, who was, and who is to come" in Revelation 1:4 and Revelation 1:8? Why is each of these three important? How does this title relate to the themes of Revelation you highlighted last time? Compare the Greek of this verse to the LXX of Exodus 3:14 : kai. ei=pen o`

qeo.j pro.j Mwush/n evgw, eivmi o` w;n kai. ei=pen ou[twj evrei/j toi/j ui`oi/j Israhl o` w'n avpe,stalke,n me pro.j u`ma/j.

(4) Revelation 1:5-7 present us two sides to God's redemptive plan for the first of many times in this book. What benefits do these verses describe for us, the redeemed? Why will some "mourn" because of him?

(5) Compare John's vision with the Old Testament visions above. Note both similarities and differences in the visions and in the responses of those given the visions.

(6) Throughout this book we will have to decide which descriptions are purely symbolic, and which also have a literal truth. In the description of Jesus, are there any details that are clearly symbolic only? Do the Old Testament passages help in answering this?

(7) Who is speaking in Revelation 1:17-18? How does this self-description relate to question 1?

(8) What one thought do you need to hold onto from Revelation 1:1-20 that will enable you to live the Christian life more effectively?

(9) Here's a nice, simple question to end with: What is reality? Consider what we've read here, as well as 1 Corinthians 13:12; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Hebrews 11:8-16; Hebrews 13:14.

Commentaries:

After you have done all the Bible reading and considered the questions, read the remainder of chapter 1 of Stedman, and pages 27 to 42 of Wilcock. Look closely at Wilcock pages 31-33, 37-39, and 42. Reconsider your answers to the questions, particularly question 7, in light of the commentaries.

### 03.03. Lesson 03

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Lesson 3: Read Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, preferably in one sitting. As you read, construct a table summarizing the parallel structure of these letters. Put each of the seven churches in vertical columns, and the following seven rows:

Addressee

from whom

"I know something good about you . . ."

"But I know something bad . . ."

Therefore . . ."

Call to hear

Promise to the overcomer. Not all letters contain all points, and some points will not differ between letters.

After this, focus on the letter to Ephesus, Revelation 2:1-7, reading it several times. Also look at these Old Testament passages: Genesis 2:9; Genesis 3:22-24, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Psalms 104:31-35, Psalms 139:19-24, Proverbs 3:13-18, Jeremiah 2:2-13.

Questions:

- (1) What is the importance of the description of Jesus in Revelation 2:1? In what way, if any, is this particular description related to the problems and challenges of this church?
- (2) Consider Revelation 2:2-3. Try to paraphrase what Jesus says here, using more words than are in the text. Do you individually live up to this church's example? Does the CBC as a church live up to this church's example? Compare also to the descriptions of other churches in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22 (look at your chart); which other churches fall short on these points?
- (3) Given all that is positive in Revelation 2:2-3, why is Jesus' statement in Revelation 2:4 so important? See also Matthew 24:12-13, Mark 12:28-34, Php 3:7-14.
- (4) Compare Revelation 2:5 to Revelation 2:2. Jesus commends the church for its deeds in Revelation 2:2, but tells them to do the deeds they did at first in Revelation 2:5. In what sense were they not doing the deeds they did at first?
- (5) What would happen to a church which lost its lampstand?
- (6) Why are the Ephesians commended for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans (see OT passages above)?
- (7) What happens to those who eat of the tree of life?

(8) How can we ensure that we do not fall into the error of the Ephesians? How can we reignite that first love if we have lost it?

Commentaries:

Now read chapters 2 and 3 of Stedman, and Wilcock, 42-44. Think again about these questions in light of the commentaries.

## 03.04. Lesson 04

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Lesson 4: Read the letter to Smyrna, Revelation 2:8-11, at least three times. Look at the chart you made during the previous study about the letters to all 7 churches.

- (1) What is distinctive about this letter to Smyrna?
- (2) Look at the description of Jesus in Revelation 2:8 and the promise to those who overcome in Revelation 2:11. Is there a link between these two verses and the challenges facing those in Smyrna?
- (3) What does Jesus mean by saying, "I know your poverty -- but you are rich"? Look ahead to the letter to Laodicea in Revelation 3:1-22. Consider also 2 Corinthians 6:1-10.
- (4) Who are those who say they are Jews but are not? See Romans 2:28-29 and Romans 9:6-13.
- (5) Who is behind the tribulation they are about to suffer? Who is being tested? Why does God allow this to happen? See Ephesians 6:10-18, 1 Peter 5:8-10, James 1:2-4.
- (6) The tribulation goes on for 10 days. Is anything added to the verse by including this phrase?
- (7) How is the letter to Smyrna applicable to us today? What truths and promises stated here still hold?

Commentaries:

Now, after considering these questions, read chapter 4 of Stedman and pages 45-46 of Wilcock. Reconsider the questions above in light of their insights.

## 03.05. Lesson 05

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Lesson 5: Read Revelation 2:12-29 -- the letters to Pergamum and Thyatira -- at least three times, without looking at notes, then consider the following questions.

(1) Look again at the descriptions of Jesus in Revelation 2:12 and Revelation 2:18, in English and Greek. Compare them to the original description John gives of his vision in Revelation 1:14-16. In Revelation 2:12, what does *th.n di, stomon* mean literally? What does the repetition of the article prior to each adjective signify? What is the importance of these introductions in Revelation 2:12 and Revelation 2:18, given the content of the rest of these letters? You may want to look at Isaiah 11:1-4, Isaiah 49:1-2, and Hebrews 4:12, as well as looking ahead to Revelation 19:15; Revelation 19:21.

(2) Consider the commendations of these two churches. Write a short paraphrase of each. How are they similar? How are they different? The Thyatira commendation is brief, but think about each of the five nouns used to describe this church.

(3) The statements against these churches both make symbolic use of Old Testament figures. The story of Balaam is contained in Numbers 22:1-41; Numbers 23:1-30; Numbers 24:1-25; Numbers 25:1-18, but the reference here is inferred from a much briefer section: Numbers 25:1-9; Numbers 31:16. For Jezebel, look at 1 Kings 16:31; 1 Kings 18:3-4; 1 Kings 18:17-19; 1 Kings 19:1-3; 1 Kings 21:23-25, as well as 2 Kings 9:22; 2 Kings 9:30-37. How is the error in Pergamum similar to that taught by Balaam? How is the "prophetess" in Thyatira similar to Jezebel?

(4) Why is there a link between idolatry and immorality?

(5) In Revelation 2:16, Jesus calls the church to repent. Different groups within this church have been addressed; who is being called to repent? He wants them to repent of what?

(6) Why is the judgment on "Jezebel" particularly apt? What is the purpose of this judgment? What is the impact of this judgment? You may want to look at Deuteronomy 13:6-11, Ezekiel 16:35-43, and Ezekiel 33:11.

(7) What do the two warnings in these letters imply for the Church in Cameroon?

(8) What task is given to the true believers in Thyatira? Consider 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

(9) Paraphrase and summarize the promises given to the overcomers. For "hidden manna" consider John 6:48-58 and Hebrews 9:4; also note that the apocryphal book 2 Maccabees, written in the 2nd century BC, reports that Jeremiah hid the ark prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (see excerpt below). Read Psalms 2:1-12, which is quoted in Revelation 2:26-27. To whom is the promise of authority given in the Psalm? Note that the word translated "rod" can also mean "scepter;" for "morning star" see Revelation 22:16.

Commentaries:

Now read chapters 5 and 6 of Stedman; also read Wilcock pages 46-51. Reconsider your answers to the questions above. Note that the two authors take markedly different positions concerning the details of the meaning of the promise to overcomers in Thyatira; is the central message different?

Excerpt from 2Ma 2:1-8 :

1 One finds in the records that Jeremiah the prophet ordered those who were being deported to take some of the fire, as has been told, 2 and that the prophet after giving them the law instructed those who were being deported not to forget the commandments of the Lord, nor to be led astray in their thoughts upon seeing the gold and silver statues and their adornment. 3 And with other similar words he exhorted them that the law should not depart from their hearts. 4 It was also in the writing that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. 5 And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance. 6 Some of those who followed him came up to mark the way, but could not find it. 7 When Jeremiah learned of it, he rebuked them and declared: "The place shall be unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. 8 And then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear, as they were shown in the case of Moses, and as Solomon asked that the place should be specially consecrated."

## 03.06. Lesson 06

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Lesson 6: Read Revelation 3:1-6 at least three times, slowly, before answering any of the questions.

(1) Look again at the chart you made of the seven letters to the churches. What is distinctive about this letter to Sardis?

(2) What does Jesus emphasize by the description of himself given in Revelation 3:1? Look again at Revelation 1:4, Revelation 1:16, and Revelation 1:20.

(3) Does Jesus say anything at all positive about this church? (Hint: the answer is yes! Look again: What does He say?)

(4) What did other people think about this church? What does Jesus think of this church? Why is there a difference? It might help to think about how an outsider might perceive the churches in Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira, in comparison to the one in Sardis.

(5) In Revelation 3:2-3, Jesus gives 5 commands to this church. Enumerate these commands, then paraphrase them. Compare these commands to those given to Ephesus.

(6) Look at the Greek of Revelation 3:3. What is the usual meaning of the word translated in the NIV and NASB "what"? If you translate this word literally, how does that change the meaning of the verse?

(7) Compare the second half of Revelation 3:3 to Luke 12:39-40 and 1 Thessalonians 5:2-6. What happens to this church if it does not follow Jesus' commands?

(8) What is promised to the obedient in Revelation 3:4-5? Consider Isaiah 61:10, Zechariah 3:1-10, Matthew 10:32-33, and Exodus 32:31-35.

(9) Consider yourself. Is there a difference in what other people would say about your relationship to Jesus and what Jesus himself would say about it? Consider the CBC in the same way. How is Jesus challenging you personally and the CBC communally through this letter?

Commentaries:

Now read chapter 7 of Stedman, as well as Wilcock pages 51-53. Kiddle, as quoted by Wilcock, says that Sardis "set herself the task of avoiding hardship, by pursuing a policy based on convenience and circumspection, rather than whole-hearted zeal." Do you consider this an accurate summary of the plight of this church? Consider question 8 again in light of this comment.

## 03.07. Lesson 07

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Lesson 7: Read Revelation 3:7-13, the letter to Philadelphia, at least three times, slowly, without referring to notes, prior to answering any of the questions.

(1) Look again at the chart you made of the seven letters to the churches. What is distinctive about this letter to Philadelphia?

(2) Look at the description of Jesus in Revelation 3:7. Consider Isaiah 22:15-25, Matthew 16:15-19, and Matthew 23:13. Paraphrase what Jesus emphasizes about himself by this description.

(3) What positive statements about this church does Jesus make in verses 8 to 10? Consider again the meaning of the open door.

(4) What is ironic about Revelation 3:9? What did the Jews anticipate happening eventually? See Isaiah 45:11-17; Isaiah 60:9-14 (have you noticed how often Revelation alludes to Isaiah?).

(5) What is emphasized in the promise to the overcomers? Contrast this promise with what Jesus says about the church in Revelation 3:8. What is the importance of the image of Jerusalem here?

(6) How can we apply this message to the church in Cameroon today?

Commentaries:

Now read chapter 8 of Stedman, as well as Wilcock pages 54-56. Wilcock is especially helpful here. Reconsider your answers in light of these comments. Do you agree with Wilcock's interpretation?

## 03.08. Lesson 08

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Lesson 8: Read Revelation 3:14-22 at least three times, slowly, without looking at notes, before answering any of the questions. Laodicea was only about 10 miles from Colosse. Paul wrote this church a letter, which is not extant; see Colossians 4:16.

(1) Look again at the chart you made of the seven letters to the churches. What is distinctive about this letter to Laodicea?

(2) What does Jesus emphasize by the description of himself given in Revelation 3:14? Consider Isaiah 65:16. Look again at Revelation 1:5. Note that "Amen" is a Hebrew word, transliterated into Greek in the New Testament. In the Isaiah verse, the phrase translated "the God of truth" is literally "the God of Amen." When in John's gospel Jesus says in our English translations, "Truly, truly," what is He actually saying? Look in your Greek Bible at John 1:51; John 3:3; John 3:5; John 3:11 (there are 21 other instances of this expression in that gospel).

(3) The last phrase in Revelation 3:14 is variously translated "the ruler of God's creation" or "the beginning of God's creation." Look at your Greek Bible; what is the word in question? How is this word used in describing Jesus in Colossians 1:18? How is it used in Matthew 19:4? Think about both translations in the context of the rest of this letter. What insights do you gain from each of the two? Consider also John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-18 (and recall that the letter to the Colossians was known in Laodicea.)

(4) Consider Revelation 3:15-16. When do you want a hot drink? When do you want a cold drink (see Matthew 10:42 in Greek, the only other place in the NT where the same word is used)? When do you want a lukewarm drink? Paraphrase the meaning of Jesus' statement here.

(5) Consider all of Revelation 3:15-20 together. What is the central problem of this church?

(6) Look at Revelation 3:17. How does this church compare to Smyrna? How do the provisions of God in Revelation 3:18 correspond to the needs of this church listed in Revelation 3:17? Look also at Deuteronomy 8:10-20 and Isaiah 55:1.

(7) Why is Jesus writing this letter to Laodicea? Look at Proverbs 3:11-12 and Hebrews 12:7-11. Note also that *zesto*, translated "be zealous" or "be earnest" in Revelation 3:20 has the same root as *zhleue*, translated "hot" in Revelation 3:15-16.

(8) Revelation 3:20 is frequently memorized and used in evangelism. To whom is Jesus speaking this verse? How does it fit in with the rest of the letter? See John 14:23.

(9) Compare Revelation 3:21 with Revelation 3:17. How is this promise to overcomers related to the issues in Laodicea? See Matthew 19:28, Hebrews 1:3.

(10) Consider the message of this letter to the church in Cameroon today.

Commentaries:

Now read Wilcock pages 56-58 and chapter 9 of Stedman. Reconsider your answers in light of these other resources.

## 03.09. Lesson 09

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Lesson 9: Read Revelation 4:1-11 at least three times, without looking at notes or commentaries. Also remind yourself of what happened immediately prior to the dictation of the seven letters to the churches by re-reading Revelation 1:10-20. Also read the visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah: Ezekiel 1:1-28, Isaiah 6:1-13. Then answer the following questions.

(1) Who says to John "Come up here" in Revelation 4:1? Look back at Revelation 1:1-20.

(2) Who is sitting on the throne? How do you know?

(3) Why are there 24 elders? Who might they represent? What occurrences of the number 12 can you remember from other parts of Scripture? What is the meaning behind their white garments and golden crowns?

(4) In Revelation 4:5, what is meaning of the phrase "the seven spirits of God"? Look at Revelation 1:4, and recall our discussion there. Look also at 2 Chronicles 4:19-20 and Zechariah 4:1-6.

(5) Try to picture in your head the four living creatures, as described here. How successful are you in doing so? Consider the visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah. How similar are these creatures to those seen by the Old Testament prophets? How are they different?

(6) Looking only at Revelation 4:1-11, what purpose do the living creatures serve? How often do they say, 'Holy, holy, holy'?

(7) The 24 elders "cast their crowns before the throne" (see verse 6 for a description of what is before the throne). What is the purpose of a crown (see 2 Timothy 4:8)? What does the action of casting their crowns before the throne symbolize?

(8) Compare Revelation 4:11 to Revelation 4:8. How are the statements of the creatures and the elders similar? How are they different?

(9) Go to the chapel and find the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Compare the words of the hymn to this chapter.

(10) Does Jesus appear in this chapter?

(11) Consider the impression left by this chapter, in the context of the seven letters to the churches which we have just read. What is your response to John's description of what he sees here? What purpose does this chapter serve?

Commentaries:

Read Stedman chapter 10 and Wilcock pages 59-68. Wilcock focuses most of his attention here on the symbolism behind the numbers used throughout the book; stop reading on page 68 when you come to "Chapter 5 amplifies. . . ."

## 03.10. Lesson 10

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Lesson 10: Read Revelation 5:1-14 at least three times, without looking at notes or commentaries. Look again at Ezekiel 1:1-28, and read Ezekiel 2:1-10; Ezekiel 3:1-4.

(1) Look ahead into Revelation 6:1-17 enough to get a feel for the content of this scroll. What does "being worthy" have to do with being able to open this scroll? What happens when the seals are broken? What is it about Jesus that makes Him worthy to open the scroll? Consider John 8:7.

(2) Why does John weep in Revelation 5:4? Why does the lack of a worthy person produce such grief?

(3) In Revelation 5:5, we are told that the Lion of Judah, the Root of David has "overcome" or "triumphed;" what is the Greek word? How often is this same word used in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22? (Hint: the first occurrence Isaiah 2:7; note there it is a dative present participle, while in Revelation 5:1-14 it is 3rd person aorist). Look at all the occurrences in Revelation 2:1-29 and Revelation 3:1-22, especially Revelation 3:21. How did Jesus overcome or triumph in a way that makes Him worthy to open this scroll?

(4) Who is speaking in Revelation 5:5? See Isaiah 11:1-10 for Root, and Genesis 49:9. In Genesis, what is Jacob prophesying about Judah? How was that fulfilled? Why are these titles -- "Lion of Judah, Root of David" -- important?

(5) When John looks at the beginning of Revelation 5:6, what does he expect to see? What does he see? What is the purpose of this surprise?

(6) In Greek, the position of the Lamb is  $\epsilon\nu\nu\ \mu\epsilon,\ \sigma\omega\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ / \ \rho\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\omega\nu\ \tau\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha,\ \rho\omega\nu\ \zeta\omega,\ \lambda\omega\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\nu\nu\ \mu\epsilon,\ \sigma\omega\ \tau\omega\nu\ \pi\acute{\rho}\epsilon\sigma\beta\upsilon\tau\epsilon,\ \rho\omega\nu\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\iota,\ \omicron\nu\ \epsilon\`{\sigma}\tau\eta\kappa\omicron\ .j$ . Can you think of any English words that begin with "meso"? How would you translate this Greek phrase literally? Consult the way  $\mu\epsilon,\ \sigma\omicron\ .j$  is used in Mark 3:3. So picture the throne, the lamb, the four living creatures, and the elders. Where is the Lamb? Why is this strange (and important)?

(7) Identify three characteristics of the lamb that John notes, and explain why each is important. See also Deuteronomy 33:17, Psalms 18:2, and Zechariah 3:1-10 and Zechariah 4:1-14. Also recall Revelation 1:4; Revelation 3:1.

(8) In Revelation 5:8, why do the elders and creatures fall down before the lamb? What is the implication of this action?

(9) Compare the songs sung to the Lamb in Revelation 5:9-10, Revelation 5:12-13 to the praise spoken to God the Father in Revelation 4:8 and Revelation 4:11. How are they similar? How are they different? Note who says the words, and how they are said, in addition to the words themselves.

(10) Compare Revelation 5:13 and Revelation 5:11 with Revelation 5:3. To whom was the angel with the loud voice speaking in Revelation 5:3? What is their eventual reaction?

Commentaries:

Read Wilcock pages 68-69, and Stedman chapter 11, then reconsider your answers.

Finally, reread Revelation 4:1-11 and Revelation 5:1-14, recalling the insights you have gained into these chapters. Spend some time in prayer, meditating on what you have learned about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In his great book, *Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards wrote:

If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart. The reason why men are not affected by such infinitely great, important, glorious, and wonderful things, as they often hear and read of, in the word of God, is undoubtedly because they are blind; if they were not so, it would be impossible, and utterly inconsistent with human nature, that their hearts should be otherwise than strongly impressed, and greatly moved by such things.

Let these infinitely great truths affect your heart, and be greatly moved.

## 03.11. Lesson 11

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Lesson 11: Read Revelation 6:1-17 of Revelation at least 3 times, without looking at notes or commentaries.

(1) Consider the progression of actions in the chapter as each seal is opened. Compare this progression to that found in Jesus' discussion in Matthew 24:1-51, especially Matthew 24:4-14 and Matthew 24:23-31. What similarities and differences do you find?

(2) Read Joel 2:28-32; Joel 3:1-21. Again, compare and contrast this passage with Revelation 6:1-17. Are these sections talking about the same event? Now read Acts 2:14-21. Does your opinion change in light of the way Peter uses the Joel passage at Pentecost?

(3) In addition, examine Isaiah 2:1-22, Isaiah 34:1-8, and Zephaniah 1:14-18; Zephaniah 2:1-3. Also, recall that Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and the Jews scattered in 70AD after a rebellion against Rome, prior to the writing of Revelation. To what extent do the prophecies of destruction found in the Old Testament and in Matthew correspond to the events of 70 AD? Can that event be the fulfillment of all these prophecies outside of Revelation?

(4) The lamb breaks six seals in Revelation 6:1-17. Try to summarize the impact of the breaking of each of the seals. What do the consequences of the breaking of the first four seals have in common? Does the same creature call out each time? The living creatures call to whom? Does the text say that the horses and their riders obey the command of the living creatures? See Zechariah 1:7-11; Zechariah 6:1-8 for other examples of horses in prophecy.

(5) When the fifth seal is broken, John looks underneath the altar. Has the altar been mentioned before? What is an altar doing in this place? Note that the blood of the sin offering was poured out at the base of the altar (Leviticus 4:7). What do the martyrs request? Are these martyrs being improperly revengeful? Are these requests consistent with Matthew 5:44? See also Luke 18:1-8.

(6) How would you describe the events that follow the breaking of the sixth seal? Consider again the other prophecies referenced above. Is this the end of time? See Luke 23:30 and Hosea 10:8 with reference to Revelation 6:16 and Luke 21:36 with reference to Revelation 6:17.

(7) Now compose a title for Revelation 6:1-17. Why does God see fit to include this chapter in the Bible? In what way do these events bring glory to (that is, display the character of) God? What impact should this have on us?

Now read Stedman chapter 12 and Wilcock pages 69-77. Here (and for much of the rest of the book) these two fine students of the Bible offer markedly different interpretations of these events. First, assume Stedman is correct, and consider the impact of this chapter on (a) a believer reading the prophecy in 95 AD; (b) a believer reading the prophecy in 1600; and (c) a believer reading the prophecy in 2002. Second, do the same assuming Wilcock is correct. What insights does this exercise give you (if any!)?

## 03.12. Lesson 12

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Lesson 12: Read the section Revelation 6:1-17, Revelation 7:1-17, Revelation 8:1 in its entirety at least 3 times, without referring to notes or commentaries. Do your best to ignore chapter divisions.

(1) At the end of Revelation 6:1-17, Jesus gives John a picture that looks to be the final judgment on the world, the end of the world as we know it. Revelation 7:1-17 and, specifically, the promise of Revelation 7:2-3 follow immediately thereafter. Similar juxtaposition of judgment and blessing appears throughout Revelation (you may recall that we saw this in its earliest form in Revelation 1:7). What is the purpose of revealing these two themes back to back?

(2) When do the events described here take place? Is there chronological progression between Revelation 6:1-17 and Revelation 7:1-17? Consider Revelation 7:2-3 and Revelation 6:12-14 in particular. Look again at Revelation 7:1 and consider how John identifies the break between Revelation 6:17 and Revelation 7:2 ff.

(3) What is a seal? What is the purpose of a seal? See Ephesians 1:13-14 and Ezekiel 9:1-11 for similar imagery; Esther 3:12; Esther 8:8 for the use of a king's seal or signet ring.

(4) Who are the "the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea?" What options are there for understanding this phrase? Consider Revelation 6:1-17, Revelation 7:1-17, Revelation 8:1. In addition, look at Zechariah 6:1-8 (and note that in Zechariah 6:5 "four spirits" can be translated "four winds").

(5) In Revelation 7:3, who is to be sealed? Can the answer to that question be different in Revelation 7:4?

(6) In Revelation 7:4, does John see the sealing take place?

(7) In Revelation 7:4-8, John lists 12 tribes. Of Jacob's twelve sons, Dan is left out and Manasseh, Joseph's son, is included. Yet Ephraim, Joseph's other son whose descendants received a portion of the promised land, is not listed separately. The words "Jews" and "Israel" together appear only five times in Revelation: Revelation 2:9, Revelation 2:14, Revelation 3:9, here in Revelation 7:4, and Revelation 21:12. Look at all of these verses, and enough of their context to understand them. What is emphasized in these other four references to Jews or Israel? Do any of these other verses help clarify the number 144,000? Note that  $144,000 = 12 \times 12 \times 1000$ , or  $12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10$ .

(8) After John hears the number to be sealed, what is the first thing he sees? How many does he see?

(9) Compare four groups of people: those mentioned in Revelation 5:3 & Revelation 5:13, those mentioned in Revelation 6:9-11, those to be sealed in Revelation 7:3, the 144,000 in Revelation 7:4-8, and those mentioned in Revelation 7:9-17. What similarities are there? What differences? Are some or all of these groups the same people or not? Where applicable, consider what they say as well as what is said about them.

(10) Consider the promises made to the multitude in Revelation 7:13-17. Are these blessings peculiar to a subset of saved people? (Look at Revelation 21:3-7; here the people to be blessed clearly are all believers).

(11) Look at all occurrences of the word "throne" in Revelation 4:1-11, Revelation 5:1-14, Revelation 6:1-17, Revelation 7:1-17 (Revelation 4:2-6, Revelation 4:9-10, Revelation 5:1, Revelation 5:6-7, Revelation 5:11, Revelation 5:13, Revelation 6:16, Revelation 7:9-11, Revelation 7:15, and Revelation 7:17). Is there any evidence that the text is referring to two different thrones here? Look specifically at Revelation 5:6 and Revelation 7:17 in Greek. Is the same Greek expression used for the relationship of the Lamb to the throne?

Now read Wilcock pages 77-84 and Stedman chapter 13. Their interpretations differ markedly, so allow enough time to read both carefully and go back over the passage and questions, seeing how each of them would respond above. Do their different interpretations have different implications for our response today to this passage? Do they have different implications for how a listener in 95 AD would respond?

## 03.13. Lesson 13

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Lesson 13: First, in one sitting read Revelation 6:1-17, Revelation 7:1-17, Revelation 8:1-13, Revelation 9:1-21. Then read Revelation 8:1-13 alone at least two additional times prior to answering the questions, without referring to notes or commentaries.

(1) Read the account of the plagues on Egypt: Exodus 7:14-25; Exodus 8:1-32; Exodus 9:1-35; Exodus 10:1-29; Exodus 11:1-8. What is the purpose of the plagues? Do you see parallels between these plagues and the events that follow the trumpets?

(2) Trumpets are common in Scripture: see this mixed assortment of verses (which is by no means complete; the word "trumpet" appears in 102 verses in the Bible): Numbers 10:1-10, Joshua 6:13-20, 2 Chronicles 5:11-14; 2 Chronicles 29:25-28, Ezekiel 33:1-9, Joel 2:1-16, Amos 3:6-8, Matthew 24:29-31; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. What different purposes do the trumpets serve in these verses? Which of these seem to be relevant to Revelation 8:1-13?

(3) Look again at Revelation 8:3-5. Consider Revelation 6:9-11 and Psalms 141:2. For what are the saints praying in Revelation 6:1-17? What is the relationship between those prayers in Revelation 6:1-17 and the events of Revelation 8:1-13? Look also at Ezekiel 10:1-7 and Luke 12:49.

(4) Look again at Revelation 8:7-12. What are the common elements in the destruction that follows the blowing of each of the four trumpets? For similar elements, see these passages in addition to the Exodus chapters noted above: Jeremiah 23:15, Isaiah 13:6-19 (especially Isaiah 13:10).

(5) In John's vision, these events take place after those of Revelation 6:1-17. But we have seen that Revelation 7:1-17 takes place prior to the end of Revelation 6:1-17, so sequence in John's vision does not necessarily imply sequence in time for the fulfillment of these prophecies. Are the events of Revelation 6:1-17 prior to, simultaneous with, or subsequent to those of Revelation 8:1-13? Look especially at Revelation 6:12-17 and Revelation 8:12.

(6) Why does God judge? Do you long for God's judgment? Should you long for God's judgment? What impact does the prospect of judgment (for you and for others) have on your life. Consider Matthew 6:10.

Now read Stedman chapter 14 as well as Wilcock pages 85-96. Be sure to read this section of Wilcock carefully, as it includes a key argument that he depends on for much of the rest of his interpretation of Revelation. Stedman's sermon is particularly good at the end, when he discusses the impact that judgment has on us. Revise your answers, if necessary, in light of the insights of these two commentators.

## 03.14. Lesson 14

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Lesson 14: Read Revelation 8:1-13 and Revelation 9:1-21 at least three times prior to answering the questions, without referring to notes or commentaries. Remind yourself of what you read last week in Exodus about the plagues. Also, look at Joel 1:1-20; Joel 2:1-32 for an Old Testament prophecy concerning God's judgment by means of locusts.

(1) Revelation 8:13 indicates that the effects of trumpets 5-7 are different in some way from the effects of trumpets 1-4. How would you characterize this difference? See in particular Revelation 9:4-5, and Revelation 9:15.

(2) Does John see the star fall? Who gets the key, the star or the angel? Concerning the star, consider Isaiah 14:12 and Luke 10:18.

(3) What are the characteristics of the abyss or pit? See also Matthew 8:28-32, Mark 5:1-11, and Jude 1:6.

(4) The locusts are told (!) that they must not harm those who are sealed. Look again at Revelation 7:1-3 and Ezekiel 9:1-11, as well as Exodus 11:1-10 on the Passover. What purpose do the locusts serve? How is this similar or dissimilar to what we find in Exodus and Ezekiel? What is the purpose of the seal?

(5) Try to picture the locusts according to the description in Revelation 9:7-10. What do you come up with? What might be symbolized by the details of this description? Make sure your interpretation of the symbols is consistent with the purpose of the locusts.

(6) "Abaddon" and "Apollyon" mean "Destroyer." See Job 26:6, Psalms 88:11, and Proverbs 15:11 for use of the Hebrew word. Who is this? Is your interpretation consistent with the purpose of the locusts?

(7) For Revelation 9:13, look again at Revelation 6:9-11 and Revelation 8:3-5, immediately preceding the sounding of the trumpets. What is this voice responding to?

(8) Revelation 9:15 is in passive voice. These angels had been prepared for this very hour by whom? What is the significance of this prior preparation? What does this tell you about the one who did the planning?

(9) On brimstone see Genesis 19:24, Psalms 11:6, and Isaiah 30:33. Also note Hebrews 2:3. Does all this pain and destruction have an impact on the people suffering through it? Consider Revelation 9:20-21.

(10) What should be our response to this passage? What is likely to be the response from those who are described in Revelation 6:9-11? Should ours be the same? What impact should this passage have on the way we conduct our lives?

Now read Stedman chapter 15 as well as Wilcock pages 96-100. Revise your answers, if necessary, in light of the insights of these two commentators.

## 03.15. Lesson 15

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Lesson 15: Read Revelation 8:1-13; Revelation 9:1-21; Revelation 10:1-11 once, and then Revelation 10:1-11 at least two additional times, without referring to notes or commentaries. Also read Ezekiel 2:1-10; Ezekiel 3:1-14, which has some interesting parallels with Revelation 10:1-11.

(1) Consider the description of the angel that opens the chapter. What do the various elements of the description signify? For rainbow look at Genesis 9:16, Ezekiel 1:28; for his face, Daniel 10:6, Matthew 17:2; for the clouds, Psalms 97:2; for his straddling the sea and the land, Genesis 1:9-10. In thinking about this angel, consider also the first phrase of Revelation 10:6 as well as Hebrews 6:13.

(2) In Revelation 10:3-4, the angel shouts like a lion's roar, prompting the seven thunders to speak. Recall that thunder accompanies hail in the Egyptian plagues (Exodus 9:1-35). For more on roaring, see Jeremiah 25:30, Amos 1:2; Amos 3:8, and especially Joel 3:9-17. For thunder, see also Exodus 19:16-19, 1 Samuel 2:10, Job 40:6-9, Psalms 29:1-11, John 12:27-29. How is thunder used in these passages? What about roaring? Given these other uses of the words, what type of statement may have been spoken by the thunders? See also 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 for others words which a man was unable to repeat.

(3) Consider Revelation 10:6 and Exodus 20:11. What is the immediate context of the verse in Exodus? When the angel announces that there will be no more delay, what is he talking about? Is there a parallel between the end of the delay, and the passage in Exodus?

(4) In Revelation 10:7, what is the mystery of God? The verse itself contains some interesting evidence: what is the Greek verb used in the phrase translated "as He preached to His servants the prophets" in the NASB and "as he announced to his servants the prophets" in the NIV. Translate this phrase literally. Does this help you understand "the mystery of God"? See also Romans 16:25-27, 1 Corinthians 4:1, Ephesians 3:2-12, Ephesians 6:19, Colossians 1:25-29; Colossians 2:1-3.

(5) As you have seen, there is a close parallel between Revelation 10:9-10 and the Ezekiel passage you read at the beginning. See also Psalms 19:10; Psalms 119:103, and Jeremiah 15:15-21. What do you understand by the scroll being sweet in the mouth and bitter in the stomach? What is written in the scroll? Is there any indication in the other passages that some bitterness follows the sweetness of the word? How does this relate to some of the larger themes in Revelation that we have discussed previously?

Now read Stedman chapter 16 as well as Wilcock pages 100-103. Revise your answers, if necessary, in light of the insights of these two commentators.

## 03.16. Lesson 16

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Lesson 16: Read Revelation 11:1-19 at least three times, without referring to notes or commentaries. Recall that we are between the 6th and the 7th trumpets; the 6th trumpet was blown in Revelation 9:13. Look back at the end of Revelation 6:1-17 and Revelation 7:1-17 to remind yourself of what happened between the 6th and 7th seals.

(1) Think about the chapter as a whole. What images here must be symbolic? Which are possibly literal?

(2) Consider Revelation 11:1-2. What is John told to measure? What is he told not to measure? In Revelation 11:2, what is the explanation given for his not measuring? What does this tell you about the concept behind the measurement? Ezekiel 40:1-49; Ezekiel 41:1-26; Ezekiel 42:1-20; Ezekiel 43:1-27; Ezekiel 44:1-31; Ezekiel 45:1-25; Ezekiel 46:1-24; Ezekiel 47:1-23; Ezekiel 48:1-35 records the measuring of a temple (I don't suggest you read all that!); see also 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Zechariah 2:1-13 for measuring the temple. Daniel 9:25-27; Daniel 12:7-12 mention similar periods of time to the 42 months referred to here.

(3) Study the other references to "temple" in Revelation: Revelation 3:12, Revelation 7:15,, Revelation 11:19, Revelation 14:15, Revelation 14:17, Revelation 15:5-6, Revelation 15:8, Revelation 16:1, Revelation 16:17, and Revelation 21:22. See also Revelation 12:6, Revelation 12:14, and Revelation 13:5 for references to the same length of time. Look also at Daniel 8:11-14. What insights do these references give you into what is happening here?

(4) List the characteristics of the witnesses, as described in Revelation 11:3-6. Are you reminded of any Old Testament characters? (No, I'm not going to give it away by listing verse references!) Why are they described as olive trees and lampstands? Where has the word "lampstand" been used before in Revelation? What did it mean then? What useful substance do olive trees yield? Think about this, then look at Zechariah 4:1-14.

(5) How can you tell in Revelation 11:7 that God remains in control, even though his witnesses are killed? Look back to Revelation 9:1-21 for the abyss.

(6) What was characteristic of Sodom and Egypt? Why does God use these terms for (literal or figurative) Jerusalem? How would you describe the reaction of the residents of this city to the death of the witnesses? To their resurrection?

(7) Note the allusion in Revelation 11:11 to Ezekiel 37:10, which reads in the LXX *kai. eivsh/lqen eivj aurtou.j to pneu/ma kai. e;zh-san kai. e;sth-san evpi. tw/n podw/n aurtw/n.* What does Ezekiel 37:1-28 picture? How might that help us understand who the witnesses refer to?

(8) Look at the end of Revelation 6:1-17 and the end of Revelation 9:1-21; compare those sections to Revelation 11:13. When the people give "glory to the God of heaven," are they repenting and turning to God? See also how Nebuchadnezzar responds in Daniel 2:46-47; Daniel 4:37. Were these examples of true repentance?

(9) The seventh trumpet sounds in Revelation 11:15. Once more John sees a picture of heaven. How would you describe the impact of the seventh trumpet? Consider Revelation 11:18 especially. Compare the title of God given in Revelation 11:17 to Revelation 4:8, in English and in Greek. What is different? Why?

(10) Think again about the 6th and 7th seals, and what happens between them. In what way are the 6th and 7th trumpets, and what happens between them, similar? In what way are they different?

(11) Revelation 1:3 tells us that the one who "heeds what is written" in this book will be blessed. What are we to heed from this chapter? What difference does this chapter make in the way we live our lives?

(12) Think again about the literal and symbolic elements of this chapter. Can you come to a conclusion about this issue? Does your conclusion have an impact on your answer to question 9? You may want to look at Matthew 24:11-14 and Matthew 24:27-31.

Now read Stedman chapter 17 as well as Wilcock pages 103-109. Wilcock page 108 is really excellent. Revise your answers, if necessary, in light of the insights of these two commentators.

## 03.17. Lesson 17

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Lesson 17: Read Revelation 12:1-17, Revelation 13:1-18, Revelation 14:1-20, Revelation 15:1-4 once, then Revelation 12:1-17 alone at least two additional times, without referring to notes or commentaries. Most students of Revelation agree that Revelation 12:1-17 begins a new section (though some would begin the section with Revelation 11:19, and others end it with Revelation 14:20).

(1) Think about the chapter as a whole. What images here must be symbolic? Are there any that are possibly literal?

(2) Who does the child represent? How do you know (see Psalms 2:7-10)? Who does the dragon represent? How do you know? Consider also Ezekiel 29:1-7; Ezekiel 32:1-10, noting that in the LXX, the word translated "monster" in Ezekiel 29:3 and Ezekiel 32:2 is *dra,kwn*, the same word translated "dragon" in Revelation 12:1-17.

(3) The woman is harder to interpret. Who or what might the woman represent? List her characteristics as described in this chapter. Don't forget Revelation 12:17. See Genesis 37:9-11, Romans 9:1-8, Galatians 4:26-28. Given these Scriptures and the characteristics of the woman, what are the advantages and disadvantages of the different possible interpretations?

(4) How would you describe the wilderness or desert described in Revelation 12:6 and Revelation 12:14? Try to put yourself in the position of someone hearing this in 95AD, who is familiar with the Old Testament. See, for example, Exodus 16:10-12 and 1 Kings 19:1-8.

(5) Consider the battle between Michael and Satan. Note that this may, but need not, follow the events of Revelation 12:1-6 chronologically. For other references to Michael, see Daniel 10:13; Daniel 10:21; Daniel 12:1, and Jude 1:9. What does Satan's being thrown down represent? These verses may or may not help: Job 1:1-22; Job 2:1-13, Zechariah 3:1-2, Matthew 28:18, John 12:31; John 16:11, Hebrews 2:14, 1 John 3:8. Is this the same event or something different from what Jesus describes in Luke 10:18?

(6) In Revelation 12:11, who has conquered? By what means? What are the implications for us today? See John 12:25. What Greek word is translated "conquered"? Where have we seen that word before?

(7) Consider Revelation 12:13-16. Look at Exodus 19:3-6, Deuteronomy 32:9-13, Isaiah 40:27-31. Recall the images used in Ezekiel 29:1-21; Ezekiel 32:1-32, which we looked at in question 2. How does this section speak to us today? What is Satan able to do to the woman and her "other offspring" (Revelation 12:17)? What is he not able to do? Recall our discussion of the witnesses in Revelation 11:1-19.

Now read Stedman chapter 18 as well as Wilcock pages 110-122. Stedman is particularly good when discussing the application of verse 11 to us today (p. 237f). In this section of Wilcock, he includes a look back at the structure of Revelation to this point; this is another key section for

understanding his arguments for the way Revelation should be interpreted. Revise your answers, if necessary, in light of the insights of these two commentators.

## 03.18. Lesson 18

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Lesson 18: Read Revelation 12:1-17; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:1-20; Revelation 15:1-4 once, then Revelation 13:1-18 two more times, without referring to notes or commentaries, prior to answering the following questions.

(1) Where does the first beast come from? The second beast? In light of Revelation 10:1-2, and our discussion of those verses, what can we say about the ability of these beasts to disrupt God's plan?

(2) Consider the first beast. Look at Revelation 12:3 and Genesis 3:14-15 as well as Daniel 7:1-28; read the entire chapter, but look especially closely at Daniel 7:1-7, Daniel 7:17-18, and Daniel 7:23-27. List the characteristics of this beast. What similarities are there between the beasts in Daniel 7:1-28 and this beast? What do the beasts in Daniel 7:1-28 represent? What, then, might this beast represent?

(3) Who worships the first beast? Why? What is the relationship between the beast and the dragon?

(4) What does this beast say? What does he do? What impact does this have on the saints? How can you tell that God is in control, even now?

(5) Revelation 13:8 reads in part "everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain" in the NASB and "all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" in the NIV. Look at the Greek, which is ambiguous. In light of 1 Peter 1:20 and Revelation 17:8, which translation is most likely correct?

(6) Reflect on Revelation 13:10. How would it speak to Christians through the ages? (Look at your Greek Bibles and note there is textual uncertainty about whether the first phrase referring to the sword is active or passive, as reflected in the difference between the NASB and NIV).

(7) Detail the characteristics of the second beast. What does it mean for the beast to look like a lamb, but to speak like a dragon? What other lambs appear in Revelation? What does this beast represent?

(8) What is the relationship between the two beasts? Given your interpretation of the beasts, how do you understand this relationship?

(9) The beast requires its subjects to get a mark on their foreheads or right hands. Look again at Revelation 7:2-3. What do people have to choose between? What are the only two options? What are the consequences of refusing the sign of the beast? What are the implications for us today, especially for the church in Cameroon?

(10) Look at Revelation 13:18 carefully. The NIV is particularly accurate here: "This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number."

His number Isaiah 666." John tells the one with insight to calculate the number of the beast, man's number. Presumably the reader would then pause, waiting for people to do the calculations! Then he gives the answer. How is the number "7" used in Scripture, particularly in Revelation? How is "3" used? Why might 666 be an appropriate number for the beast, for man's number?

Now read Stedman chapter 19 and Wilcock, pages 122-131. Revise your answers in light of the insights of these commentators.

## 03.19. Lesson 19

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Lesson 19: Read Revelation 12:1-17; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:1-20; Revelation 15:1-4 once, then Revelation 14:1-20, Revelation 15:1-4 at least two additional times, without referring to notes or commentaries.

(1) Consider Revelation 14:1-5. Reread all of Revelation 7:1-17; Revelation 5:9. What additional information does Revelation 14:1-20 give us about the sealing described in Revelation 7:1-17? Why does God have John see the 144,000 at this point? What purpose does the vision serve? If the 144,000 are literal people, what sex are they? Recall our earlier discussion (lesson 12). Do these verses in Revelation 14:1-20 influence your interpretation of the meaning of the 144,000? Consider also Jeremiah 31:1-14; "virgin" refers to whom in this passage? (Note that the word translated by the NIV as "maidens" in Jeremiah 31:13 is the singular Hebrew word for "virgin", translated *parqē, noi* in the LXX.)

(2) What is the significance of the sound of the voice in Revelation 14:2? See Revelation 1:15 and Revelation 10:3-4, and recall our discussion of the latter.

(3) In considering Revelation 14:6-12, recall what John has just seen in Revelation 13:1-18. What is the purpose of the first angel's proclamation? In what sense is the gospel eternal? What is the relationship between Revelation 14:8 and the rest of this section? See Jeremiah 51:1-10. What had the Babylonians done to Jerusalem and the Israelites? Why is this important?

(4) Consider Revelation 14:9-13. Look again at Revelation 13:7-17. Why did the people agree to have the beast's sign put on their foreheads or right hands? What are the temporary consequences of doing that? What are the eternal consequences? Humanity ends up being divided into how many groups? Why is this important for us today? See also Isaiah 34:1-10, and note the allusion to Revelation 14:9-10.

(5) Compare Revelation 14:12 to Revelation 13:10. How are these verses similar? How are they different? Does the meaning of "the perseverance of the saints" differ in the two verses?

(6) Look at Revelation 14:14-20. What is a sickle? What is it used for? Would anyone use a sickle for harvesting grapes? How many times does the sickle swing? What happens the first time? The second? What are these swings of the sickle symbolizing? Consider Matthew 13:24-30.

(7) Now focus on Revelation 15:1-4. In Revelation 15:2, what does "victorious" mean? Who is victorious? Why is this language used? These people then sing the "song of Moses . . . and the song of the Lamb." In what sense is the following song "of Moses"? Of the Lamb? Look at Exodus 15:1-27, and recall the context of that song. How is this context similar?

(8) In Revelation 15:4, what is the relationship between fearing God and glorifying Him?

(9) Look back over this section, Revelation 12:1-17; Revelation 13:1-18; Revelation 14:1-20; Revelation 15:1-4. What is the impact of God's judgment? What adjectives are used to describe

God's judgment? Do you understand why each of those adjectives is used?

Now read Stedman chapter 20 as well as Wilcock pages 131-138. Revise your answers, if necessary, in light of the insights of these two commentators.

## 03.20. Lesson 20

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Lesson 20: Read Revelation 15:1; Revelation 15:5-8; Revelation 16:1-21 three times, without referring to notes or commentaries.

(1) Make a chart with 7 columns and four rows. The first row stands for the seal judgments (Revelation 6:1-17, Revelation 7:1-17, Revelation 8:1), the second for the trumpet judgments (Revelation 8:2-13, Revelation 9:1-21, Revelation 10:1-11, Revelation 11:1-18), the third for the bowl judgments. Fill in the chart by briefly summarizing each of the seven judgments for each cycle. What similarities do you find across seals, trumpets, and bowls? What differences? How would you describe the major difference between the bowls and the trumpets? Is your inference from the details of the judgments consistent with the description of the bowls in Revelation 15:1 and Revelation 15:5-8? Finally, fill in the fourth row by selecting the closest parallel with the bowl judgments from these statements from Exodus concerning the plagues: Exodus 7:17 f, Exodus 8:2 ff, Exodus 9:8 ff, Exodus 9:22 f, Exodus 10:21 ff, and Exodus 19:6-9.

(2) What is the significance of the smoke filling the temple? See Exodus 40:34-35 (at the completion of tabernacle) and 2 Chronicles 5:11-14 (at the dedication of the temple). Why can no one enter?

(3) Consider Revelation 16:5-7. What speaks in Revelation 16:7? (see also Revelation 6:9, Revelation 8:3-5, and Revelation 14:18). What does this signify? God's judgments are said to be true, righteous, and just (remember that the word "righteous" in Greek is the same as that translated "just.") Why are they just? Some today would argue that this kind of judgment is not in accord with God's love and mercy. In this text, what argues against that view? See also Isaiah 49:25-26, 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10, and Hebrews 10:26-31.

(4) In Revelation 16:8-11, what is the impact of the judgments upon the people? How do they respond? Is this related to your answer to question 3?

(5) Consider Revelation 16:12-14, and Revelation 16:16. Look ahead to Revelation 19:20. Who then is the false prophet? Who is gathering together for war? Who prompts them to do so? Look at Ezekiel 38:15-23; Ezekiel 39:1-22 and Joel 3:9-14.

(6) Why is Revelation 16:15 included here? For "thief," recall Revelation 3:3; see also Matthew 24:42, Luke 12:40 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 and 2 Peter 3:3-12. Why are we told to "keep" or "guard" our garments? What do the garments symbolize? See Revelation 3:4, Revelation 3:18, Revelation 6:11, Revelation 7:9, as well as Zechariah 3:1-5 and Matthew 22:1-14.

(7) In Revelation 16:17, who says, "It is done"? What is done? For "great city," see Revelation 11:18, but also Revelation 17:18 and Revelation 18:1-24. How would you characterize the impact of the final bowl? See Hebrews 12:25-29.

(8) Compare Revelation 16:18 to Daniel 12:1. In Daniel 12:1-13, what event is being described? Is this the same event in Revelation 16:1-21?

(9) How do you respond to this section? Are you fearful, awestruck, confused, or angry? Or all of the above? Do Revelation 16:5-7 reflect your response, or not?

Now read Stedman chapter 21 as well as Wilcock pages 139-150. This is a particularly helpful section of Wilcock, especially pages 139-141. Revise your answers, if necessary, in light of the insights of these two commentators.

## 03.21. Lesson 21

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Lesson 21: Read Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-10 once, then Revelation 17:1-18 an additional two times, without referring to notes or commentaries, before answering the questions. Also, read Jeremiah 51:1-64 and Daniel 7:1-28.

(1) What is the theme of the section from Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-10? How is this theme related to the theme from Revelation 15:5-8, Revelation 16:1-21?

(2) Remember early on in our study we asked the question, "What is reality?" With that in mind, how do you understand the "great harlot"? What are her characteristics? Look back at Revelation 14:8 and Revelation 16:19. How does the Bible use the words "fornication," "immorality," and "adultery" in addition to referring to sexual sin? Recall Revelation 2:14; Revelation 2:20-22 as well as Jeremiah 3:6-9. See also 1 John 2:15-17. Ask yourself again the question we have raised several times: Would your interpretation be of value to listeners in 95AD, in 1600AD, and in 2000AD?

(3) How do you relate the characters in the section Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-10 to those in Revelation 12:1-17, Revelation 13:1-18, Revelation 14:1-20, Revelation 15:1-4? What are their similarities? What are their differences?

(4) In Revelation 17:3, we are told John is taken into a wilderness before he sees the harlot. What does the wilderness represent (recall Revelation 12:6 and Revelation 12:14 and our discussion)? Why is John taken there at this point?

(5) In Revelation 17:7 the angel says he will tell John the "mystery" of the woman. How does the New Testament use the word "mystery," and how does this usage differ from ours today? See Revelation 1:20 as well as Matthew 13:11, Romans 11:25, Romans 16:25-26, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Ephesians 1:9-10, Ephesians 5:32, Ephesians 6:19, and especially Colossians 1:25-29; Colossians 2:1-3.

(6) Look at Revelation 17:8. Recall Revelation 9:2 and Revelation 11:7. Meditate on this phrase: "whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." Look back at Revelation 13:8, and then ahead to Revelation 20:12-15. Also consider these verses and their context: Matthew 25:34, John 17:24, Ephesians 1:4, and 1 Peter 1:20. Why is your name being written in the book of life from the foundation of the world important to you today? Why is it important -- and not simply an offhand comment -- in the context of Revelation 17:1-18?

(7) What is the significance of the seven mountains in Revelation 17:9 (also called "kings" and "heads")? Rome is known as the city built on seven hills, and surely there is an allusion to Rome here. But is that the whole story? Why is this picture important for us today? What do mountains signify in Scripture in general and Revelation in particular? (Here is an exhaustive list of the use of this Greek word in Revelation: Revelation 6:14-16, Revelation 8:8, Revelation 14:1, and Revelation 21:10).

(8) In Revelation 17:12-14, what is the purpose of the ten kings? How long do they succeed in that purpose? What is the end result? Why?

(9) In Revelation 17:14, the allies of the Lord of lords are referred to as the "called and chosen and faithful." How is this related to the phrase in Revelation 17:8 about names written in the book of life? Who does the calling? Who does the choosing? Who is faithful (see Revelation 2:10; Revelation 13:1-18)?

(10) What are the parallels between Daniel 7:1-28 and Revelation 17:1-18? Consider particular Revelation 17:4 and Daniel 7:21. Who overcomes in each of these verses?

(11) Consider Revelation 17:16-17. What do these verses tell us about the forces in opposition to God? About God's sovereignty? How powerful are these forces? If God is in control of these forces, is there also a message about all forces that oppose God? How does that insight have an impact on how you live today?

Now read pages 287-97 of Stedman, as well as Wilcock pages 151-166. I find Wilcock quite helpful on this difficult section of Revelation. Revise your answers, if necessary, in light of the insights of these two commentators.

## 03.22. Lesson 22

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Lesson 22: Read Revelation 17:1-18, Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-10 once, then read Revelation 18:1-24, Revelation 19:1-10 at least two more times, without looking at notes or commentaries. Then read Isaiah 47:1-15, Ezekiel 26:1-21; Ezekiel 27:1-36, and Jeremiah 50:1-46; Jeremiah 51:1-64.

(1) Enumerate the parallels between Revelation 18:1-24 and the Old Testament passages you just read. How was the prophecy in Isaiah fulfilled originally (see Daniel 5:1-31)?

(2) In Revelation 17:1-18 Babylon is pictured primarily as a prostitute. What is the predominant picture of Babylon in Revelation 18:1-24?

(3) Think of Revelation 18:1-24 as the script for a play. Who are the speakers? List and number them. Remember, in the Greek New Testament there are no quotation marks; translators must interpret the text in order to place quotation marks. Thus, the quotation marks in your translation are not inspired . . . ) (4) Look at the first speaker's statements. Why does he say that Babylon has fallen?

(5) Why does the second speaker say that Babylon has been judged? How will she be judged? Why is this judgment just?

(6) When does the second speaker stop speaking?

(7) Consider the reaction of the third group of speakers. Why are they terrified? What aspect of the judgment do they focus on?

(8) Consider the fourth group of speakers. Why are they upset? Why do they love the city? What items are in their cargo that we would find unusual? How could this have both a historical and a spiritual fulfillment? What aspect of the judgment do these speakers focus on? How is their focus different from that of the third group of speakers?

(9) Who speaks Revelation 18:20? Some translations group Revelation 18:19-20 together, as spoken by the 5th group. Others have Revelation 18:20 spoken by the second speaker, as his conclusion. Consider these two options. What is the focus of the fifth group of speakers in Revelation 18:19? Is Revelation 18:20 more consistent with that verse or with the other statements made by the second speaker?

(10) How can you summarize the statements of the 6th speaker? How is his statement consistent with his action?

(11) Consider Revelation 19:1-4. Have we heard all these speakers before in Revelation? What is the meaning of "Hallelujah"? What is the cause of their rejoicing? Why are God's judgments said to be righteous or just?

(12) In Revelation 19:5-9, what is the new cause of rejoicing? Why is this particularly appropriate? Who is the bride? Contrast the details of the bride with the details of the woman in Revelation 17:1-18 and the city in Revelation 18:1-24.

(13) The NASB reads in Revelation 19:8 "fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." The Greek word translated "righteous acts" is dikaiw,mata., which can also be translated "decrees of justification" or "vindication"; for example, see Romans 5:16. See Isaiah 61:10-11; Isaiah 62:1-5. What purpose or purposes do the robes serve in that passage? What, then, do the robes signify in Revelation 19:8?

(14) Given our understanding of Babylon and the bride, what are the implications for us today of this section of Revelation? Consider our discussion of "real reality" once again.

Now read Wilcock pages 166-174 and Stedman pages 297-304. Revise your answers to the questions in light of their comments.

## 03.23. Lesson 23

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Lesson 23: Read Revelation 19:11-21; Revelation 20:1-15; Revelation 21:1-8 once, and Revelation 19:11-21 two more times. This longer passage includes the description of the millennium, which we will consider in some detail in lessons 24 and 25; this lesson we focus on Revelation 19:1-21.

(1) Consider Revelation 19:11-16. What verb tenses are used here in the description of the rider on the white horse? Enumerate his characteristics. Read Revelation 1:12-16, the first description of Jesus in this book. Also look at the descriptions which begin each of the seven letters to the churches: Revelation 2:1, Revelation 2:8, Revelation 2:12, Revelation 2:18, Revelation 3:1, Revelation 3:7, and Revelation 3:14. Who is the rider?

(2) Consider Revelation 19:13 and Revelation 19:15. Why is his robe dipped in blood? Look back at Revelation 14:19-20, as well as Isaiah 11:1-5; Isaiah 63:1-6 and Psalms 2:1-12. Is this disturbing or comforting? Why?

(3) In Revelation 19:14, who are those with the rider? Why are they clothed in white linen? Do they wear armor or carry weapons? See Revelation 17:14 as well as Matthew 26:53 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7.

(4) Consider Revelation 19:17-18. To what are the birds called? Contrast this with Revelation 19:9. See also Isaiah 34:1-8 and Ezekiel 39:4; Ezekiel 39:17-20. What is the purpose of the feast of the birds in Ezekiel 39:1-29 (see Ezekiel 39:21-29)? Is the purpose in Revelation 19:17-18 similar?

(5) Who fights against the rider in Revelation 19:19-20? What do they represent? Look back at Revelation 13:1-18, and recall our discussion. What happens to these opponents? After this judgment, who is left to oppose the rider? Look back at Revelation 12:1-17.

(6) What is your reaction to these images? Is your conception of God consistent with these verses? What impact do these verses have on how we conduct our lives today? Consider Hebrews 12:18-29.

Now read Wilcock pages 182-187 and Stedman chapter 23. For now, skip over Wilcock pages 175-182, where he discusses different approaches to the millennium. (We'll read that for next time.) Revise your answers to the questions in light of their comments.

## 03.24. Lesson 24

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Lesson 24: Read Revelation 19:11-21; Revelation 20:1-15; Revelation 21:1-8 once, and Revelation 20:1-15 two more times. This lesson, we will examine Scriptures related to the second coming of Jesus and the end of the world, trying to compare Revelation 20:1-15 with other prophecies about end times. In this preparation, I want you to avoid altogether commentaries and notes; we will only read a few pages in Wilcock where he lays out the three basic millennial positions. In the next lesson, we will read some different interpretations of this passage. But first, we must be sure we understand the thrust of what the entirety of Scripture says about the end.

(1) What is the progression from the end of Revelation 19:1-21 to the beginning of Revelation 20:1-15? What event is depicted at the end of Revelation 19:1-21? How does Revelation 20:1-15 build on Revelation 19:1-21? We have seen before that sequence in John's vision need not imply sequence in the occurrence of events he sees.

(2) Is there evidence in the passage regarding whether or not the events described in Revelation 20:1-15 follow those of Revelation 19:1-21? One of the key elements in interpreting Revelation is distinguishing between prophecies that should be taken literally and those that are symbolic. Is the chain of Revelation 20:1 literal? Is the abyss? What type of creature is Satan? For more on the binding of Satan, see Mark 3:22-27. Is that passage referring to the same event as Revelation 20:2? See also Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 17:30-31, John 12:20-23; John 12:30-32, and Luke 10:17-18.

(3) In Revelation 20:4, does John see people in their bodies? What possibilities are there for understanding where they might be reigning? What evidence in this verse helps us to know where they are reigning? On reigning with Christ, see 1 Corinthians 6:1-3. To whom is Paul speaking in those verses? Who is John talking about in Revelation 20:4-6?

(4) Look in your Greek Bibles at the two occurrences of *ἐζήσαν* in Revelation 20:5-6. Do they mean the same thing in both occurrences? How are the words "life" and "resurrection" used in Romans 6:4-13 and John 5:24-29? Does this cast any light on your answer to the first question?

(5) Compare Revelation 20:7-10 with Revelation 14:18-20, Revelation 16:13-16, Revelation 17:12-14, and Revelation 19:19-21. What evidence suggests that these are all describing the same event? What evidence suggests otherwise?

(6) Compare Revelation 20:11-15 with other prophecies of judgment, such as Isaiah 24:1-23 and 2 Peter 3:3-15. Will judgment come suddenly, like a thief? Can this be the case if it occurs after a literal 1000 years, when we know the exact time?

(7) Is there any reference to Jews or Israel in Revelation 20:1-15? Is there a distinction between the way Jews and Gentiles are saved? See Colossians 3:11, Romans 11:17-22, and Ephesians 2:11-22.

(8) Now consider these other passages referring to the end times. In particular, consider how many "second comings" of Christ are prophesied in each passage. In particular, are the prophecies of what we find in Revelation 6:12-14 and the verses cited in question 4 the same time as the coming of Christ and the final judgment, or separated from those events by a considerable period of time? How do we understand the prophecies of blessings to Israel? Here are the passages: Isaiah 2:1-4, Isaiah 65:1-25, Matthew 24:9-31, John 5:28-29, John 6:54, 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, and 2 Peter 3:3-15.

(9) Now read Wilcock 175-182. This is an excellent treatment of the advantages of each of the three millennial positions. To which position do you now lean? Why?

## 03.25. Lesson 25

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Lesson 25: This week's preparation is rather different from others in this study. You have already examined Revelation 20:1-15 and other relevant Scriptures. For this week, we will focus more on various interpretations, and the impact of those interpretations on the lessons we draw from the passage. Remember, the major goal of this week is not to have you adopt a position with regard to the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-15; rather, we need to learn and take to heart the lessons God teaches in this chapter.

Read Revelation 19:11-21; Revelation 20:1-15; Revelation 21:1-8 once more. Review pages 175-182 of Wilcock, as well as last week's preparation guide. Then read Wilcock 187-197 and Stedman chapter 24. If you have time, you may also want to read in the commentaries on reserve. Mounce (251-267) and Ladd (259-274) present somewhat different interpretations than either Stedman or Wilcock; Walvoord is the most scholarly advocate for Stedman's position, while Beale (972-1038) as usual is the most thorough, interacting with all opposing views.

(1) Go through Wilcock and Stedman once more, noting the passages they cite to support their positions. How would Wilcock answer Stedman? How would Stedman answer Wilcock? Think in particular about these points: the relationship between Revelation 19:1-21 and Revelation 20:1-15 (particularly whether or not Revelation 19:17-21 and Revelation 20:7-10 describe the same event); the meaning of the binding of Satan; the meaning of the "first resurrection;" the location of the thrones; and the identity of those who are judged before the white throne.

(2) In your opinion, what are the best arguments in favor of the amillennial position? What lessons would this position hold for John's readers in 95AD? In 1600? Today?

(3) In your opinion, what are the best arguments in favor of the premillennial position? What lessons would this position hold for John's readers in 95AD? In 1600? Today?

(4) Given the Scriptures we have read for weeks 24 and 25, what are the major lessons God wants us to take away from a study of the second coming of Christ? How should these lessons affect the way you live this week?

Enjoy!

## 03.26. Lesson 26

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Lesson 26: We have come to one of the most glorious passages in all of Scripture. Pray earnestly for insight and understanding and excitement prior to reading.

Read Revelation 21:1-27; Revelation 22:1-21 through twice without looking at commentaries or notes, prior to answering these questions:

(1) Look at Revelation 21:1-8. What images and themes are brought up in these eight verses? Now compare Revelation 21:1-8 with what you find in Revelation 21:9-27, Revelation 22:1-19. What images and themes are common to the two sections?

(2) Read Isaiah 54:11-17, Isaiah 55:1, Isaiah 60:1-22, Isaiah 62:1-7, Isaiah 65:16-19, Zechariah 1:16; Zechariah 2:1-5, and glance over Ezekiel 40:1-49; Ezekiel 41:1-26; Ezekiel 42:1-20; Ezekiel 43:1-27; Ezekiel 44:1-31; Ezekiel 45:1-25; Ezekiel 46:1-24; Ezekiel 47:1-23; Ezekiel 48:1-35. In Ezekiel, read carefully Matthew:1-5, Ezekiel 43:5 and Ezekiel 48:35, then briefly scan the remainder. What parallels do you find between these passages and Revelation 21:1-27? What differences do you find?

(3) The word "new" appears four times in Revelation 21:1-5. What is new about the new heavens, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem? How are these related to the "old" versions?

(4) Look back at Revelation 17:1-3, the beginning of the section on Babylon. Compare those verses to Revelation 21:9-11. Who speaks to John in those verses? In what ways is the picture of Babylon similar to that of Jerusalem? In what ways is it different? What do you think is the purpose behind this clear comparison of the two cities? See also Isaiah 1:21, Ephesians 5:25-27, and Hebrews 13:14. What does the new Jerusalem picture?

(5) Whose names are written on the gates? On the foundations? Given your answer to the last part of question 4, why are these names on the gates and foundations? See also Ephesians 2:19-22 and Matthew 16:18; consider what that last verse means in light of Revelation 21:14. You also may want to look back at Revelation 7:2-17 and think about how your understanding of that passage changes (if at all) after studying Revelation 21:1-27.

(6) In Revelation 21:15-17 the city is measured. What is unusual about these measurements? Some translations change the measurements into our units ("1500 miles"); they are easier to interpret in the original terms ("12,000 stadia"). Similarly in Revelation 21:17, the original reads that the measure of the wall is "144 cubits." See also 1 Kings 6:19-20. What do the New Jerusalem and the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple have in common? Consider your answer in light of Revelation 21:22. Why does the angel measure the city? Recall our discussion of measurement in Revelation 11:1-2.

(7) Consider Revelation 21:23-27. What happens to all earthly glory? What does the text mean by the "glory of God"? Why is Revelation 21:27 included? Who enters the city?

(8) Now read Stedman pages 333-345, and Wilcock pages 197-209; this section of Wilcock is really excellent. Reflect in particular on the following quote from C.S. Lewis' final Narnian Chronicle, The Last Battle (which Wilcock quotes on the bottom of page 203); does this shed light on Revelation 21:1-27 for you? The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

## 03.27. Lesson 27

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Lesson 27: Read Revelation 21:1-27; Revelation 22:1-21 again.

(1) Recall Wilcock's suggestion that Revelation 21:1-8 provides an outline of Revelation 21:9-27; Revelation 22:1-19. Without looking back at Wilcock to see where he draws the parallels, examine the two chapters. Do you think his understanding of the structure of the passage is valid?

(2) In Revelation 22:1, what type of water is in the river? Where do most rivers originate? Where does this river originate? Why is this significant? See Zechariah 14:8 and John 4:9-14.

(3) Consider Revelation 22:2; see also Psalms 1:1-6 and Ezekiel 47:12. What is unusual about this tree? How is the tree in Psalms 1:1-6 similar to this tree? How is it different?

(4) In Revelation 22:3 we read "there shall be no more curse." What curse is the text referring to? See Genesis 3:17 and Zechariah 14:11.

(5) Who receives the name of God on their foreheads? What is the significance of this mark? See Revelation 7:3; Revelation 14:1, and recall our discussion of those passages.

(6) In what sense is Jesus coming quickly (Revelation 22:7 & Revelation 22:12)? In what sense is "the time near" (Revelation 22:10)? See Habakkuk 2:1-4, 2 Peter 3:8, and Revelation 2:16; Revelation 3:11.

(7) Consider Revelation 22:11. Why is there no call for repentance in this verse? See Matthew 25:10 and Luke 13:25. What point is being made in all three of these verses? See also Isaiah 6:9-10, Ezekiel 3:27, Daniel 12:10, and Matthew 13:9-17.

(8) Consider Revelation 22:12-17. What different types of "reward" are mentioned? Who receives the just "reward" for what he has done? (Note that the Greek word translated "reward" can mean "just recompense," and thus can include punishment). How is Revelation 22:12 consistent with Revelation 22:17? See 2 Corinthians 5:9-21, Hebrews 11:6, Revelation 7:14; Revelation 11:18.

(9) Read the concluding sections of Wilcock and Stedman. Let me quote from each:

"As a symbolic book, [Revelation] requires interpretation, but be careful. Do not take away its meaning by emphasizing the symbolic at the expense of the literal. Do not destroy its intent by accepting only the literal without understanding what it symbolizes. Believe it." (Stedman, from the original sermon)

Jesus has given [the Revelation] to us as a sacrament of the imagination, to quicken the pulse and set the soul aflame over the gospel which all too often we take for granted. (Wilcock, 222) Is your pulse quickened? Is your soul set aflame? What are the lessons of this book that you will be sure to heed?

(10) Finally, read the entire book of Revelation in one sitting, keeping these comments from Wilcock and Stedman in mind. Reflect on our earlier discussions, but focus once again on the overall picture provided for us here. Ask yourself again, "What is the primary message of this book today? What was the primary message of this book in 95AD and 1600AD?"

Thank you for all your work. May God fulfill His promises, and bless you through your reading, studying, and heeding the words of this book.

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## 04.17. Who are You? (Lev\_26:1-46)

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Who are You? A sermon on Leviticus 26:1-46 by Coty Pinckney, Community Bible Church, Williamstown, MA, March 14, 1999

Many of you know that my son Andrew began taking cello lessons recently from Nat Parke. A couple of weeks ago, while Nat and I were chatting after the lesson, he looked at me and asked, "Coty, are you a musician?"

I was taken aback. No one had ever asked me that question before, and I didn't know the answer. I am an economist. I am a runner. I am a Dean (whatever that may be). I am a father, a husband, a son; I am a Christian, a preacher, a teacher, an elder: am I a musician?

I avoided answering the question, simply telling Nat that I took piano as a child, still play occasionally, and used to sing choral music before so many kids came along. But the question bothered me: Am I a musician?

Later, I looked up the word "musician." Merriam-Webster says a musician is "a composer, conductor, or performer of music." Well, sure, by that definition anyone who sits at the piano and sight-reads some hymns while other people are around is a musician. But that's not the question I was trying to answer.

No. "Am I a musician?" means: Is making music important to me? Do I set aside time for music? Is making music part of who I am? This morning we will conclude our series in Leviticus by examining chapter 26. We have seen that the book of Leviticus is not, as is so commonly thought, a book which lays down the law, saying, "Step over this line and I will zap you!" Instead the entire first half of the book details God's provisions for the Israelites, God's answer to every need of the Israelites, through the sacrifices and the priesthood. We have seen how God's plan all along was to create "a people for his own dear possession," a people to love and to cherish. We have seen that the sacrificial system is not a way of earning one's salvation, but rather God's gracious provision for dealing with the Israelites' inability to keep all the law. The entire system is a picture of God's grace, foreshadowing all that Christ accomplished for us on the cross. That is the message of the first half of Leviticus: God has chosen you as his people, God has provided for your every need, he overcomes your every weakness, so that you might become his dear possession. The second half of the book asks: If this is so, if God has set us apart for this special purpose, how should we then live? And the answer is: This privilege is so great, that our character must become like God's character. He has chosen us, he has given us every provision to make up for our weaknesses. Our responsibility -- as pictured in the Sabbath -- is to actively depend on him so that we might become what he intends us to be. Rest in him, in his power, turning our thoughts and attention to Him, every minute of every day.

Like most of Leviticus, the passage we consider today is frequently misunderstood. A quick reading gives the impression that God is telling the Israelites, "Obey me and I will bless you; disobey me and I will curse you." But God here is not concerned with outward obedience to a set

of rules. In this chapter, the Lord tells the Israelites who he is, and presents them with two choices for what they might become. Given all the provisions he has made, as detailed in the first 25 chapters of the book, he asks: "Are you going to be all I intend you to be, all I enable you to be? Are you going to be a holy, special people for my own dear possession? Or will you reject me and abhor me? The answer to that question determines your destiny."

Similarly, the question for us this morning is: Who are you? Who are you?

#### Outline of Chapter

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 26:1-46. Before we start to read, let's consider the structure of the chapter.

Leviticus 26:1-2 remind the Israelites of the prohibition against worshiping any other Gods, and the need to keep "my Sabbaths." Recall that all the festivals we have considered the last two weeks were special Sabbaths, so included in this command were the regular Sabbath, the annual festivals, the Sabbath year, and the Year of Jubilee. God is reminding the Israelites of his prominence, and their need to rest in him in all areas of their life, at all times. The rest of the chapter follows a simple structure: God gives an "if-statement," followed by a consequence, concluding with a statement about who God is. Leviticus 26:3 is the positive "if-statement," and Leviticus 26:4-12 give the results. If the Israelites act like God's people they will be blessed in certain ways. Leviticus 26:13 concludes that section, giving a statement about who God is.

Similarly, Leviticus 26:14-15 provide a negative "if-statement:" "If you do not listen . . ." Leviticus 26:16-39 basically give the consequences of that "if-statement," although we will see later that the structure is somewhat more complex. Leviticus 26:40-43 promise that if the Israelites confess and turn to God, he will forgive. The chapter concludes with one more statement about who God is.

Rearranging the order of these topics clarifies the central point God is making here. So let us consider in turn these four elements:

Who God is,

the If-statements,

the list of blessings,

and the list of curses.

Then we will consider how this chapter applies to our own lives. WHO GOD IS

Look at Leviticus 26:13, Leviticus 26:44-45 of Leviticus 26:1-46. Recall that the word "Lord" printed in all caps is a substitution for the name of God, pronounced something like "Yahweh." This name connotes the covenant relationship between Israel and God, so permit me to make that substitution as I read:

13 I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high

44b I am Yahweh their God. 45 But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am Yahweh.

God here emphasizes his relationship to these people. He says, "I am your God. I remember my promises. I took you out of slavery, I broke the power of the forces that controlled you. So do not choose to be a slave again! I enabled you to walk with your head held high -- so don't return to the disgrace of your former life! You are mine, you are special -- so live up to that calling!"

Furthermore, note that God says he brought the Israelites out of Egypt "in the sight of the nations." God has chosen these people in order not only to save them, but also to display His glory, to show His character to all of creation. The actions of the people of Israel bring glory -- or dishonor -- to the very name of God! This is further incentive for the people to live up to their calling. Our situation is similar. God says we are his own dear children:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1 NIV)

We belong to Him, we are his family. He rescued us from slavery, and enables us to walk with heads held high. We are the family of God! And he has done this, in part, to display his wisdom and grace to all of creation, including his enemies (Ephesians 3:10). What we do brings honor or dishonor to our God, our Father.

IF STATEMENTS Let us now turn our attention to the "If-statements." Consider Leviticus 26:3, Leviticus 26:14-15 :

3 "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, (NASB)

14 But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, 15 and if you despise my statutes and abhor my judgments and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant Note also Leviticus 26:21 : "if you remain hostile toward me . . ."

Consider these two alternatives. Is God saying here, "If you keep all the law, I will bless you, but if you violate even one commandment I will punish you forever"? In more technical terms, is God setting up a system of works righteousness? That cannot be God's intention here, for those are not the two alternatives presented. Look at the second alternative. "If you . . . despise my statutes and abhor my judgments." God is not talking about slipping up, a sin that someone commits once. Instead, God here is talking about a condition of the heart. God is talking about characteristics of our life: Is covenant-breaking characteristic of us? Is breaking His commands characteristic of us?

I believe one key to understanding this entire chapter is assigning the correct meaning to the words "statutes" and "commandments" in verse 3. God tells the Israelites to "walk" in his statutes and keep or guard his commandments. The verb "to walk" is frequently used in Hebrew to mean "to live out every moment of every day." The idea is, "every step I take, I am living this out." For example, the same Hebrew word is used in Proverbs 10:9 :

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever follows perverse ways will be found out. (NASB) To "walk in integrity" is to live a life characterized by integrity at all times. So what are the statutes that the Israelites are to live out every moment of every day? What should characterize the life of every Israelite? What will provide a fitting contrast to the "if-statement" of verses 14 and 15, the abhorrence of God's judgments? The necessary answer is that "statutes" and "commandments" refer to all of the first 25 chapters of Leviticus. Unquestionably this includes the sections we tend to think of as law, such as chapters 17 to 20; but this also includes all God's

gracious provisions for meeting man's weaknesses in chapters 1 to 16, and the resting in God so clearly taught in chapters 23 and 25. So the Israelites are to live by loving God's law, for it reveals his character; they are to live by depending on His strength, as pictured in the Sabbath and the festivals; they are to live by offering themselves to God, as pictured in the grain or present offering; they are to live by depending on the gifted humans God provides for them, as pictured in the priesthood. All of this is included in the idea of walking "in my statutes" and keeping "my commandments." In these two "if-statements," God says: "You are mine. I am giving you all you need to take on my character. Are you going to accept that gracious gift or not?" So God here is not talking about a one-time decision to follow him. Nor is he talking about outward obedience to a set of rules. God is talking about character; he is talking about our hearts. This is disturbing, because most of us picture ourselves as far away from Leviticus 26:14-15 but not in Leviticus 26:3. We won't admit to abhorring God's judgments or despising his statutes, but we don't always walk in those statutes, we don't always depend on Him. We like to think there is room to stand somewhere in between. But God tells us here that, ultimately, all of us are in one camp or the other: we either love God, accept his provision for us -- or we hate Him and despise his laws, rejecting him. There is no middle ground.

**BLESSINGS** With that understanding of the "if-statements," let us move on to consider the promised blessings. We'll start by reading Leviticus 26:3 again:

3 If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, 4 I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. 5 Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land. 6 "I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. 7 You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. 8 Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you. 9 "I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. 10 You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new. 11 I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. 12 I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.

How might we characterize these blessings? God here promises the Israelites five different types of blessing if they walk in His ways:

Abundance of food (and the consequent good health), as seen in Leviticus 26:4-5 and Leviticus 26:10;

Peace and safety, Leviticus 26:5-6;

Victory over enemies, Leviticus 26:7-8

Population growth (in part, a consequence of the first three blessings), Leviticus 26:9;

And a close relationship to God, Leviticus 26:11-12.

As is always the case in Leviticus, the Israelites are examples for us, "on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:11)." There is a spiritual reality behind these (partly) material

blessings. Abundance of food for us symbolizes God's provision for our spiritual health; we have received "everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), everything we need to grow in Him. He provides us with spiritual peace; we can be sure that he will rescue us "from every evil attack" (2 Timothy 4:18 -- note that Paul knew he would soon be executed when he wrote this. Question to contemplate: Was his execution an "evil attack?"). He provides us with the power to achieve victory over Satan, our enemy; we need not let sin reign in us, for God always provides a way out of every temptation (Romans 6:12 and 1 Corinthians 10:13). Furthermore, God declares that he will work through us to spread His word to the world; the gospel spreads, and the family of God grows, because of God's work in us. Finally, we share with the Israelites the promise of a close relationship to God: We become His family.

All this is promised to the man who walks in God's statutes, who leans on God and trusts in His understanding at all times. Unfortunately, the Israelites did not receive these blessings because they instead chose the other path.

**CURSES** Let us look at the consequences of abhorring God's judgments:

16 I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that shall waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you shall sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies shall eat it up. 17 'And I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you.

How might we characterize the curses we find in these two verses? Note they are exactly the opposite of the blessings we found:

No food, for the enemies steal it;

Dwindling population, because of illness and war;

No peace or safety;

Defeated by enemies;

No close relationship with God -- His face is set against them.

The Israelites suffer terribly when they turn their backs on God. They lose all the blessings they would have received, but God doesn't stop there -- they then reap the opposite! The next verses show clearly that God gives the Israelites many chances to repent. Look at verses Leviticus 26:18, Leviticus 26:23-24 and Leviticus 26:27-28. In each case, God promises to see if the problems they face have caused the Israelites to repent. And if they don't repent, God promises to make their punishment seven times worse! God's purpose in this is redemptive; he wants Israel to turn, not to continue to reject him.

We will not read all of these verses, but I encourage you to do so. You will see that God's statements here closely parallel the history of the people of Israel. While there are individual exceptions, as a whole the Israelites reject God, they abhor his judgments, and so the nation lives through these horrible punishments.

Let us read again beginning with Leviticus 26:27 :

27 'Yet if in spite of this, you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, 28 then I will act with wrathful hostility against you; and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins. 29 'Further, you shall eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you shall eat. . . . 33 'You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. 34 'Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. . . . 38 'But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies' land will consume you. 39 'So those of you who may be left will rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies; and also because of the iniquities of their forefathers they will rot away with them. The Israelites did not keep the Sabbath. They did not keep the Sabbath Year, or the Year of Jubilee. They did not watch out for the poor. They did not keep the festivals. They did not offer sacrifices with right attitudes, or even right external actions. They did chase after idols; they did follow the customs of the people around them. And so all of these curses fell upon them. The Assyrians scatter the northern 10 tribes, effectively destroying them; in 586 BC the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem and take the people into exile. Later, in 70 AD the Romans destroy Jerusalem again after causing such a terrible hunger that the Jews ate the bodies of those who died in the city. But remember, we started our exposition of this chapter by looking at who God is. And God is faithful even when his people are unfaithful. Let us keep reading:

40 'If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me-- 41 I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies--or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, 42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land. . . . 44 'Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them completely, breaking My covenant with them; for I am Yahweh their God. 45 'But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am Yahweh.'" (Leviticus 26:40-42 hew-42; Leviticus 26:44-45 44-45 NASB replacing LORD with Yahweh)

God waits for the people to repent. And while most individuals will not repent, God will keep His covenant. To use terms employed elsewhere, he will keep a remnant, a faithful group in the middle of this general rejection of Himself. God will fulfill his purposes; He will make for himself a people for His own possession.

APPLICATION How does all this apply to us? Of what relevance is this chapter to Christians today?

C.S. Lewis addresses this question in *Mere Christianity*, where he writes:

People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, "If you keep a lot of rules I'll reward you, and if you don't I'll do the other thing." I do not think that is the best way of looking at it. I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a

creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other. (Book 2, Part 4)

You see what he is saying? We are all walking in one of two directions. Each choice we make, each step we take, leads us one way or the other. There are only two alternatives.

## CONCLUSION

Let's return to the question Nat Parke addressed to me: "Coty, are you a musician?" After thinking about that for some time, I decided that music is important to me. Music is a part of who I am -- and I've been neglecting that part. So, yes, I've decided to set aside some time every day -- not much, given all my commitments, but a little time each day -- to playing music. And I've started to work once again on that Chopin waltz I abandoned more than 10 years ago, the last time I regularly practiced. The book of Leviticus which we now conclude raises a similar question: Who are you? Are you a Christian? Is being a Christian an important part -- the most important part -- of who you are? Do you set aside time to put into practice your Christian beliefs? Every day, regularly, do you set aside time for prayer and Bible-reading? Are you walking, step by step, with the Lord? Are you displaying the love of Christ in all the small things you do each day?

When you are tempted?

When someone annoys you?

When you are faced with a need?

What about your heart, and your thoughts? Inside yourself, who are you?

Many of you young people made commitments to the Lord two weeks ago at Snow Camp, the winter retreat. You know how pleased we all are with those commitments. But let me tell you: Those commitments are worthless -- indeed, they are worse than worthless -- unless you live up to them day by day. In school -- are you showing that you are a child of God? At home, with your parents, with your brothers and sisters -- are you living out the love of Christ?

Many of us as little children learned the song, "The wise man built his house upon the rock." You all remember that the rains come down and the floods come up, but the house on the rock stands firm. On the other hand, the foolish man builds his house on what? The sand. And when the rains come, the house on the sand collapses.

All of this is found in Matthew 7:1-29, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Who is it that Jesus says is like the wise man? Jesus says, "He who hears these words of mine" -- and makes a decision? And makes a commitment? No. Those are necessary steps but that is not what Jesus says. "He who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice." The wise man puts into practice the words of His Lord. Jesus refers to the foolish man in the preceding verses, Matthew 7:21-23. They foolish people may say to Him, "Lord, Lord. But: Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21 NIV) So who are you? Will you be like that foolish man -- coming to church,

going through religious rituals, even supposedly making a public decision for Christ -- but then not doing the will of your Father? Do not deceive yourself; God will not be mocked. Or will you be like that wise man, leaning on God and not on your own understanding, depending upon God's provisions, actively resting in Him?

Listen to the words of such a wise man:

7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . . I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ . . . . 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. . . . 13b But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Php 3:7-8, Php 3:10-11, Php 3:13-14)

Paul considers everything in his life rubbish compared to the greatness of knowing Christ. Rubbish! Yes, even being a musician or an athlete or an artist or a student -- all of these pale in comparison to the greatness of knowing Christ. So who are you? Where is your heart?

What we do, the choices we make, make a difference -- not because we are saved by works but because of the nature of saving faith. True faith acts; true faith understands who God is, who Jesus is, and who I am as a Christian. True faith more than anything else wants to be like Christ, and thus turns the will to depend on the Spirit within, in consequence becoming more and more Christlike.

Every choice you make, every step you take, moves you closer to Christlikeness or Satanlikeness. And make no mistake: in the end you will be like one or the other. There is no middle ground. Who are you?

\_\_\_\_\_ This sermon was preached at Community Bible Church in Williamstown, MA on 3/14/99. I decided to preach a series of sermons on Leviticus after reading Ray Stedman's series, which is available at the PBC web site <<http://www.pbc.org/>>. I am heavily indebted to him both for his insights into Leviticus, and for all I learned about expository preaching from him

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<<http://www.expository.org/index.htm>>

## S. Life-Changing Doctrines: A 10-Week Study

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Life-Changing Doctrines: A 10-Week Study By Coty Pinckney In these 10 lessons we will study some of the basic doctrines of our faith, and examine how these doctrines are important for living the Christian life. Our theme is found in 2 Peter 1:5-11 :

Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these, you will never fall, and your entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. The topics we will address and the primary scriptural references are:

1) What does it mean to become a Christian? Ephesians 2:1-10 2) What is the Bible? 2 Timothy 3:12-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5 3) Who is Jesus? John 1:1-18 4) Who is God the Father? Isaiah 45:18-24, Psalms 103:1-22 5) Who is the Holy Spirit? John 14:15-21; John 16:5-16 6) Who is Satan? Luke 4:1-13, John 8:44 7) What is Prayer? Matthew 6:1-13 8) The Nature of Christian Morality Galatians 5:13-26 9) Living the Christian Life Hebrews 3:7-19; Hebrews 4:1-16 10) Growing in Christ 2 Peter 1:3-11

Each lesson below contains the scripture reference together with questions to answer during your preparation. Note that some of the questions have a right or wrong answer, while others can be answered in different ways by different persons. Please commit yourself to spend time every week reading the passage, prayerfully reflecting on the questions, and answering them to the extent you are able. It would be helpful to keep this handout and your written answers together in a notebook or folder. In addition to the main passage, note that each sheet lists several additional passages on the central topic that you may want to study also. In each meeting, we will discuss your answers, and emphasize how to apply the truths we learn to our lives.

LESSON 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN Main Passage: Ephesians 2:1-10

Passages for digging deeper: The entire book of 1 John, but especially 1 John 1:5-10, 1 John 2:1-11, John 1:12-13, Romans 10:9-12, John 6:35-40 John 10:22-30, Matthew 7:21-27

(1) List the characteristics of man prior to being saved, according to this passage. Can you summarize what these mean in a single phrase?

(2) What did God do for us, according to this passage? (Note: Paul uses at least three different images here) (3) Why did God do these things for us? What attracted God to us?

(4) What does it mean to be "raised with Christ"?

- (5) Where does faith come from?
- (6) What is the role of faith in salvation?
- (7) Did we cause ourselves to have faith?
- (8) After becoming saved, how do we change?
- (9) Can we lose our salvation by reverting to disobedience?
- (10) How can you know that you have salvation?
- (11) Can a person think he is a Christian when he is not?
- (12) What does this imply for our attitudes and actions?

## LESSON 2: WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Main Passage: 2 Timothy 3:12-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Passages for Digging Deeper: Hebrews 4:12-13, Psalms 119:1-176 (especially Psalms 119:9-16), Psalms 1:1-6, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Isaiah 55:1-13

2 Timothy is the last letter in the Bible that Paul wrote before being executed. He is writing to Timothy, who must carry on much of Paul's work in the churches that Paul began. It is an intensely personal letter, written to a man whom Paul regarded as a son.

Read the whole passage several times before answering the questions:

- (1) Paul discusses two types of men in this passage: the man who knows and follows scripture, versus the man who does not. We will refer to them as the "godly man" and the "godless man." List the characteristics of each type of man, along with the verse number that gives the characteristic.
- (2) See 2 Timothy 3:13. Who does the godless man try to deceive? In what way is he himself deceived?
- (3) What sort of teaching do people like to hear? Should a preacher try to please his listeners? What should be your attitude on hearing the Word of God preached, or when you read the Bible?
- (4) In order to keep from being deceived, Paul tells Timothy to do what? (2 Timothy 3:14).
- (5) What is the difference between learning something and becoming convinced of it?
- (6) Why should Timothy be convinced of the teaching he has received?
- (7) When did Timothy begin to learn the Scriptures?
- (8) What are the Scriptures able to do in the life of the godly man?
- (9) How much of Scripture is inspired (God-Breathed)? What does this mean? What does it imply for the reliability of Scriptures?
- (10) What should we do if we encounter two passages in Scripture that seem to contradict each other?

(11) In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul says that Scripture is useful in four ways. Describe what each of these words means. Think carefully about the difference between rebuking and correcting.

(12) What is the result of learning and relying on Scripture? (2 Timothy 3:17).

(13) What does it mean for Timothy to be prepared "in season and out of season?" Why is this important?

(14) On what basis should Timothy correct and rebuke his listeners?

(15) What is the result of not believing the Scriptures?

(16) How can you reap the benefits described in this passage of knowing the Scriptures? (You may want to examine some of the additional passages when answering this question.) LESSON 3: WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

Main Passage: John 1:1-18

Passages for Digging Deeper: Hebrews 1:1-12, Hebrews 2:10-18, Hebrews 4:14-16, Hebrews 5:1-10, John 8:48-59, Matthew 17:1-8. Php 2:6-11

John was written decades after the other 3 gospels. At that time several incorrect beliefs about Jesus were becoming prevalent. Throughout the book, John is careful to show the reader who Jesus is, and what importance that has for the believer.

Read the whole passage several times before answering the questions:

(1) How many different words does the author use to refer to Jesus in this passage? List them and the verses in which they are found. What do they tell us about the character of Jesus?

(2) What does the author tell us of the relationship between Jesus and God the Father? Look at the entire passage, but especially at John 1:18.

(3) Was Jesus created? Defend your answer from this passage.

(4) Was Jesus a man? Defend your answer from this passage.

(5) Are your answers to questions (3) and (4) consistent with each other?

(6) What does the author tell us about the relationship between Jesus and the world?

(7) What is glory?

(8) Who is the man named "John" referred to in this passage?

(9) In John 1:15, John is quoted as having said that Jesus was coming after him but was before him. How can this be?

(10) Why did Jesus come into the world, according to this passage?

(11) What impact should understanding who Jesus is have on our lives?

LESSON 4: WHO IS GOD THE FATHER?

Main Passages: Isaiah 45:18-24, Psalms 103:1-22

Passages for Digging Deeper: John 4:23-24, Acts 4:23-31, Psalms 100:1-5, Revelation 4:1-11; Revelation 5:1-14, Romans 1:18-21, Romans 11:33-36, Daniel 9:4-19, 1 John 4:1-21, Isaiah 6:1-8

This week we are discussing the characteristics, or attributes of God. These attributes cannot be separated from our response to them. The Isaiah passage is from a section in which God is speaking of the return of Israel from exile and, at the same time, prophesying about the coming of the Christ and the eventual restoration of the kingdom of Israel. The book of Psalms is full of praise for God's attributes and shows us clearly man's appropriate reaction to them. We could study almost any Psalms 103:1-22 is a well-known example of the praise for God's character found throughout the book.

Read both of the main passages several times before answering these questions.

(1) List the characteristics of God found in the Isaiah passage (don't stop until you have found at least 7!).

(2) Now supplement that list with those additional characteristics found in Psalms 103:1-22. How many of the same characteristics do you find? How many additional ones (and don't stop here until you have found at least 3 additional ones)?

(3) Go back to your list for questions 1 & 2 and, for each characteristic of God, state a problem that results for the Christian who does not fully understand that God has this characteristic.

(4) Which of these characteristics do you know the least about?

(5) What does "holy" mean?

(6) Given these attributes of God, what should be our response? What does God expect of us? What clues can you find in these passages?

(7) From this study, write a brief definition of worship.

(8) Why is worship of God so vital for a Christian? What can we do to improve our worship?

## LESSON 5: WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Main Passages: John 14:15-21; John 16:5-16

Passages for Digging Deeper: Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 1 Corinthians 12:11 & 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 8:14; Romans 8:26; Romans 12:6-8; Acts 8:20; Acts 13:4; Genesis 6:3; Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30; Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:22-23; John 7:37-39; 1 Peter 4:10.

1. Why were the disciples feeling anxious (observe the context of John 14:1-14) and insecure at that time? Why would the promise of the Holy Spirit help to comfort them?

2. Looking at John 14:15, why did Jesus talk about obedience before mentioning the gift of the Spirit?

3. What help does John 14:16 give us about understanding our eternal security in Christ?

4. What titles does Jesus give for the Spirit in John 14:15-21? What does each title tell us about His ministry in our lives?

5. Why can only a true Christian have the Holy Spirit living in him?
6. Why did Jesus say in John 16:5-7 that it was really better for His followers if he left them to go to Heaven? Do you think that they believed Him at first?
7. What is the convicting work of the Spirit, in regard to the unbelieving world and to the Church of Christ? (see John 16:8-11)
8. In John 16:13, what work does the Spirit do in our minds and understanding? How do we see the unity of the Trinity in this verse?
9. In John 16:14-15, observe the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. How do they work together?
10. Why did Jesus wait until close to the time of His death to tell His disciples about the Holy Spirit?
11. In what other ways does the Holy Spirit work in the lives of believers? Examine the passages for digging deeper.
12. What sins can a believer commit against the Holy Spirit? See Matthew 12:31, Acts 7:51, Ephesians 4:30-32, 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Explain the nature of each of these sins.

#### LESSON 6: WHO IS SATAN?

Main Passages: Luke 4:1-13, John 8:44

Passages for Digging Deeper: Revelation 12:7-11; Revelation 20:7-10, Ezekiel 28:12-19, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Ephesians 6:10-18, Genesis 3:1-5, 1 Corinthians 10:12-13.

"Know your opponent" is useful advice for athletes, generals, -- and Christians! Information about Satan is scattered throughout the Bible, with no long passages describing his character. As always, the questions this week concentrate on the main passages, but since all the additional passages are short, I recommend strongly that you take the time to read through all the passages for digging deeper.

Read both of the main passages several times before answering these questions.

- (1) When Satan says "If you are the Son of God" in the Luke passage, the Greek words used could also be translated "Since you are the Son of God." Satan is not here tempting Jesus to question his relationship to God, as the English words may lead you to believe. Instead, what different desires is Satan appealing to in Jesus?
- (2) Can you summarize the general nature of Satan's temptations in Luke?
- (3) How does Jesus counter Satan's temptations in every case?
- (4) Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to turn the stones into bread?
- (5) Did Satan ever tempt Jesus again? (Hint: the answer is in this passage).
- (6) List the characteristics of Satan that are revealed in this passage. For each of these, list also an attribute of God which is the opposite.

(7) Given these characteristics of Satan and the response of Jesus to temptation, what can we do to prepare ourselves to deal with Satan's temptations?

(8) Think of three of the most prevalent lies that Satan has used in his temptations of you. Do your best to think of a verse in Scripture that counters this attack. We will share these lies during class. Ask for help in class if you have a hard time finding a verse that counters the Devil's lies.

## LESSON 7: WHAT IS PRAYER?

Main Passage: Matthew 6:1-13

Passages for Digging Deeper: Luke 9:18, Luke 11:1-13, Romans 8:26-27, Hebrews 4:16, Ephesians 1:15-19; Ephesians 3:14-21, Php 4:6-7, John 15:5-10; John 17:1-26, 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Daniel 9:1-19

(1) Matthew 6:1 presents the theme of the first half of Matthew 6:1-34. Why is it so important not to perform religious acts in order to be seen? Does this command contradict Matthew 5:16?

(2) (Matthew 6:5) In what way have the hypocrites "already been paid"?

(3) Is Jesus telling us not to engage in public prayer meetings in Matthew 6:6? What does it mean to be alone with God, and why is this important?

(4) Can I be certain that my prayer life is in good shape if I pray for an hour every day?

(5) Matthew 6:8 says that "your father already knows your requests before you speak them." So why is it necessary to speak them?

(6) Examine Matthew 6:9-13 carefully. Jesus here lays out a pattern of praying. Note that there is an invocation, followed by 6 or seven requests.

(a) What is the purpose of the invocation?

(b) The first three requests are all of what type? What about the last three or four requests? What implications does this have for us as we pray?

(c) What does it mean for God's kingdom to come?

(d) Consider the order of the requests in Matthew 6:11-13. Why does Jesus put physical needs ahead of spiritual needs?

(e) Does Matthew 6:12 say that God forgives us because we have forgiven others?

(7) When can we be certain that God will answer our requests affirmatively?

(8) What lessons have you learned that you can apply to your own prayer life?

## LESSON 8: THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY Main Passage: Galatians 5:13-26

Passages for Digging Deeper: The rest of Galatians, Matthew 5:17-48, Mark 12:28-34, 2 Timothy 2:22, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 7:1-25, & Romans 12:1-2, John 15:1-10, Colossians 2:20-23; Colossians 3:1-4 In the book of Galatians, Paul is energetically countering a heresy that had developed: some Jewish Christians were requiring Gentiles to become Jews in every way prior to

being recognized as Christians. These requirements included being circumcised and following all aspects of Jewish law. Paul argues in the first four chapters that this idea is completely opposed to the Gospel, because through Christ's death we are freed from the law. But the logical question arises: if we are not under the law, can we follow our natural desires and act however we wish? Paul answers this question in Galatians 5:13-26, Galatians 6:1-10.

Read the passage through several times before answering the questions.

1. If we follow our natural desires what will happen to us?
2. Given your answer to (1), what is wrong with laying down a set of laws or rules to control and limit these natural desires? (You may want to look at Romans 7:1-25 and the Colossians passage here also).
3. What is the role of the Spirit in Christian morality?
4. Is a man who is led by the Spirit under the law? Will a man who is led by the Spirit obey the law?
- (5) Some non-Christians say, "If I become a Christian, I will have to stop doing so many things that I will miss out on life!" How can you use this passage to counter that argument?
- (6) "Christian morality is based on the desire to avoid doing wrong." Is this statement correct or incorrect? Explain your answer.
- (7) What implications does this study have for the way you live your life?

LESSON 9: LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE Main Passage: Hebrews 3:7-19; Hebrews 4:1-16

Passages for Digging Deeper: Zechariah 4:6, 2 Chronicles 20:1-30, Hebrews 10:19-25, Romans 8:1-17, Php 1:6; Php 2:1-16; Php 4:13, John 13:1-17; John 15:5, James 1:2-4, Colossians 1:29; Colossians 2:6-7 The book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were becoming discouraged. There is evidence that at this time, about thirty years after Christ's death, miracles were becoming much less common, that some of the excitement of the early years had worn off, and that some Jewish Christians were considering returning to Judaism. This fairly difficult passage is one of the most extended passages dealing with how to live the Christian life. Read it slowly, concentrating on the line of argument, and then use the questions to help you re-read the passage.

- (1) After reading the entire passage, pick out three or four words that occur several times in the passage and seem to you to be the primary topics of discussion.
- (2) The passage begins with a quote from Psalms 95:1-11, and can be considered an inspired commentary on that Psalm. What is the "time of testing in the desert" to which the Psalm refers? In what sense had these people heard God's voice?
- (3) How is Hebrews 3:12 related to Hebrews 3:7-11?
- (4) Summarize in your own words the implications of Hebrews 3:12-13 for the role of Christian fellowship in living the Christian life.
- (5) From Hebrews 3:16, what was special about these people? Why is this important for the flow of the author's argument?

(6) In Hebrews 3:18-19 the author gives two explanations for why these people did not enter God's rest. What are they? Are these two separate reasons, or are they related to each other?

(7) In Hebrews 4:1, why does the author conclude that "the promise of entering his rest still stands?"

(8) From Hebrews 4:2-3, in what ways are we today like the people of Israel? In what way can we be different?

(9) Did Joshua fulfill the promise of entering God's rest when he brought the Israelites into the promised land? Defend your answer from this passage.

(10) Why is it important to the author's argument that David wrote Psalms 95:1-11 long after Joshua lived?

(11) Hebrews 4:10-11 are the conclusions to this line of argument. What does it mean for us today to "enter God's rest?"

(12) Read Hebrews 4:11 carefully. How can one "make every effort to enter that rest?" Isn't this like saying, "Use all your energy to go to sleep?"

(13) Hebrews 4:12 -- an important verse describing the role of the Bible in our life -- begins with the word "for." It is thus linked with the preceding argument. What is the link between Hebrews 4:12-13 and the preceding verses in this passage?

(14) Similarly, Hebrews 4:14-16 begin with the word "therefore." What is the link between these verses and the preceding argument? (Hint: look carefully at Hebrews 4:16.)

(15) Summarize the implications of this passage for living the Christian life. How does your added understanding of this topic affect the way you will live this week?

LESSON 10: GROWING IN CHRIST Main Passage: 2 Peter 1:3-11

Passages for Digging Deeper: Ephesians 1:15-23; Ephesians 3:14-21, Hebrews 11:1-40 Hebrews 12:1-29, Php 1:3-11, Php 3:12-16, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, 2 Timothy 2:1-13

Like 2 Timothy, 2 Peter was written when the author knew he would be dying soon. Peter here reminds his readers of what he has already taught them, particularly emphasizing the necessity of growth, the danger of false teachers, and the certainty of Christ's return.

1. What must we do in order to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3-4)?
2. What promises do you think Peter is referring to in 2 Peter 1:4?
3. What does "corruption" mean? Think of an example from the physical world of something being corrupted. How do we avoid this corruption?
4. 2 Peter 1:5 begins "For this very reason." What reason is Peter referring to?
5. 2 Peter 1:5-7 describe a "ladder" of Christian growth, with 8 "rungs" in the ladder. Why does Peter begin with faith?

6. Consider the rungs on the ladder one by one. In what sense does each rung build on the previous rung?
7. Is it possible to skip a rung? What is the result of doing ?Song of Solomon 8:1-14. What is the meaning of "godliness" and why is it included in the list?
9. Where are you on this ladder? How long have you been there? Are you climbing up, staying at the same level, or (!) falling down?
10. If you are not moving up the ladder, what happens to your Christian life? What are the two possible explanations for your lack of movement up the ladder (2 Peter 1:8-9)?
11. Is it possible to grow in the Christian life to a certain stage and then to stay the same, without any more growth?
12. 2 Peter 1:10 begins with the word "therefore." Why? What does Peter mean by saying we should make our calling and election sure? What does the ladder have to do with our election?
13. If possible, consult both a New American Standard and a New International Version for translations of 2 Peter 1:11. Note the differences. If we are moving up the ladder, when will we be blessed with this abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord & Savior?
14. Finally, sum up the lesson, and the entire study: How do we grow in Christ? What will you do -- this week and in the weeks to come -- to ensure that you continue to grow?

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## S. The Message of the Bible (6 Week Study)

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### The Message of the Bible

What is the central message of the Bible? This book was written by many different men over a period of more than a thousand years; is there a central message at all? Why is this book, completed almost two thousand years ago, revered and followed today by so many people?

If you wonder about such questions, this brief study is for you. In six lessons, we survey the central message of the Bible. We see what the Bible says about the creation of the universe, the creation of mankind, the disobedience of the first man, and the terrible results that follow. We see how God from the beginning devised a plan to cause good to come from those terrible results - and how this plan reached its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. So please join us. No prior beliefs are assumed, and questions from any perspective are welcome. If you've ever wanted to know more about what the Bible says, if you've ever been curious about the person of Jesus, this study is for you.

(A note to leaders: The questions below for weeks 2 to 6 are intended to be handed out the prior week, with participants encouraged to read the text and answer the questions. It is helpful also to hand out Bibles to participants. There is no handout for week 1; those questions are here to assist you as a leader, and for those who do this study on line.) Week 1: The Creation Week 2: Man's Disobedience and God's Punishment Week 3: God's Promise of a Deliverer Week 4: Jesus and New Birth Week 5: The Death of Jesus Week 6: Jesus is Alive!

Week 1: The Creation Read Genesis 1:1-31, Genesis 2:1-9, and Genesis 2:15-25. You can click on the verse references to read the passage.

- 1) According to Genesis 1:1, did God have a beginning? Does God have existence apart from the physical creation?
- 2) Genesis 1:2 says the earth was initially "formless and empty." Look over the remainder of Genesis 1:1-31; in which verses does God add form or structure to the earth? In which verses does He fill its emptiness?
- 3) What does Genesis 1:3, Genesis 1:6, Genesis 1:9, Genesis 1:11, Genesis 1:14, Genesis 1:20, Genesis 1:24, and Genesis 1:26 have in common? What is the response to God's word of command?
- 4) What do Genesis 1:4, Genesis 1:10, Genesis 1:12, Genesis 1:18, Genesis 1:21, Genesis 1:25, and Genesis 1:31 have in common? Is there evil in this creation? How does this description change after the creation of man?
- 5) The book of Genesis was written in the Hebrew language. In Hebrew, there are no comparative and superlative forms ("good, better, best"); instead, a word is repeated to put it in superlative form. For example, see Isaiah 6:3 where God is called "holy, holy, holy." Similarly, in Hebrew a

phrase will be repeated for emphasis two or three times, frequently with a slight variation in word order or words used, both for emphasis and for bringing out important aspects of the statement. Consider Genesis 1:26-27 with these thoughts in mind. These verses emphasize that God made us “in His image.” What clues do these verses contain about the meaning of that phrase?

6) How is the task God gives to man in Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 1:28 similar to the actions of God we considered in question 2?

7) Genesis 2:4-25 elaborates on Genesis 1:26-30, providing more details about the creation of the first man and woman. God makes the first man out of what? What task does He give the first man?

8) In Genesis 2:16-17, does God give the first man freedom to eat from the garden? Is there sufficient food for him? Why does God tell the man not to eat from one particular tree? What will happen to the man if he eats from it? Will eating from the tree be good for him?

9) God makes the first woman out of what? What is God’s purpose in making her?

10) How would you describe the life of the first man and woman at the end of Genesis 2:1-25? What is the quality of their relationship to God? What is the quality of their relationship to each other? Do they have sufficient food? Do they have rewarding work?

## Week 2: Man’s Disobedience and God’s Punishment

During next week’s session, we will read Genesis 3:1-24; it would be helpful if you could read that section ahead of time, either in your Bible or on the internet:

Consider these questions:

1) Recall from last week: At the end of Genesis 2:1-25, what if anything do the first man and woman lack in the garden?

2) In Genesis 3:1-5, how does the serpent twist the truth? What does he challenge concerning Eve’s conception of God? Why is this important?

3) In Genesis 3:6, what 3 things does Eve see concerning the tree? How many of those, if any, are true?

4) Why did Eve and Adam eat the fruit from this tree? How had their conception of God changed?

5) What was the first impact of their eating the fruit (Genesis 3:7 -- compare to Genesis 2:24-25)? What was the second (Genesis 3:8-10 -- compare to Genesis 2:15-22)?

6) As a result of their disobedience, what happens to Adam and Eve? Are they cursed? What happens to the ground?

7) Who was behind the serpent’s temptation? In what sense Isaiah 3:15 a promise to Adam and Eve?

## Week 3: God’s Promise of a Deliverer

Friends: This week we will cover a lot of ground, with just a few verses from each passage, to give you an overview of how God reiterates and elaborates on His promise to use a descendant of Eve

to crush the serpent's head. To help matters, I will print the key verses below, though you may want to look at a Bible to see more of the context of each passage. These questions are solely for your benefit -- you are very welcome to join us even if you do not read these passages and answer the questions ahead of time. You will get more out of our time together, however, if you look at this ahead of time, since we probably won't have time to look at all these passages together.

1) In our first session, recall that we said God created everything for a purpose -- to show His character, to display His glory. But last week we saw that man's disobedience led to the creation no longer serving this purpose. God could have destroyed it all -- but He didn't. Look (again for those of you who attended last week) at Genesis 3:1-24, describing the sin of Adam and Eve. Look especially at Genesis 3:15. In what way is this verse a promise?

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

2) Around 2000BC, God called a man to be the ancestor of the One who will crush the serpent's head. Look carefully at Genesis 12:1-3. What does God promise to Abram? Who will benefit because of God's blessing Abraham? Think about your answer to this last question: Does that include your people?

Genesis 12:1-3 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

3) Years later, Abram still does not have a son; he wonders how God can fulfill this promise. Genesis 15:1-6 tells what then happens. Read these verses. Look particularly at Genesis 15:6. How did Abram become righteous before God? Did he perform any ritual? What did he do? How is this different from the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden?

Genesis 15:1-6 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." 2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

4. God changes Abram's name (meaning "exalted father") to Abraham (meaning "father of a multitude") -- before granting him any children! Indeed, Abraham grows close to 100 years old and his wife Sarah 90, and they have no children. But God miraculously gives them a son, Isaac. When Isaac is about 13, God tells Abraham to sacrifice him on top of a mountain. Abraham obeys -- but at the last second God tells him to stop. Genesis 22:17-18 follow (you may want to read verses 1-16 also). Who will be blessed because of the descendants of Abraham and Isaac?

Genesis 22:17-18 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of

their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

5. In later chapters, God confirms His promise to Isaac and Isaac's son, Jacob. How do these promises add to what God has already told Abraham? Why is it important for God to reiterate His promise? What does God say to all three? Why is this so important?

(To Isaac) Genesis 26:3-4 Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed,

(To Jacob) Genesis 28:13-14 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

6. God miraculously leads Jacob (whose name He changed to Israel -- thus his descendants are called Israelites) and his sons into Egypt, where they stay for 400 years. While they are honored at first, they eventually become slaves. God takes them out of slavery and brings them back to the country He gave to Abraham (called Israel today) by His mighty hand. Through His servant Moses, God sets up an elaborate system of animal sacrifices, picturing how He will cover their sinfulness, so that they can be His people. Read Leviticus 17:11. What must happen for any sin to be forgiven? Why is this the case?

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.

7. Right before they enter this promised land, Moses speaks to the people. The following interesting verses are part of his speech. Why did God choose the nation of Israel? What attracted Him to this people? What is the purpose of God choosing Israel? What do we learn about God's character in these verses?

Deuteronomy 7:6-10 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. 7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. 10 But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him.

7. About 400 years later God raises up a king of Israel named David. These verses consist of God's words to David (spoken through a prophet) after he proposed building a temple, and David's response. How is 2 Samuel 7:8 similar to the passage from Deuteronomy above? Why did God

choose David? What does God promise David? How does this differ from what was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? According to David, what purpose does God serve by keeping His promise? How is this related to God's purpose in creating the world?

2 Samuel 7:8, 2 Samuel 7:16 "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. . . . 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'"

(David's reply) 2 Samuel 7:25-26 "And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, 26 so that your name will be great forever. Then men will say, 'The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!' And the house of your servant David will be established before you.

8. David wrote many Psalms, or poems praising God. Several of these look forward to a descendant of David who will fulfill the promises made over the centuries. Psalms 22:1-31 is a clear prophecy concerning a coming king who will suffer. Psalms 22:1-18 (not printed here) relate his sufferings, describing crucifixion centuries before it was invented. Look at Psalms 22:27. How is this similar to the other promises you have seen? How is it different?

Psalms 22:27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,

9. Finally, the prophet Isaiah lived about 300 years after David (around 700 BC). He prophesies about a coming, suffering servant who will pay for the sins of the people. If you read Psalms 22:1-18, what is similar about this passage and that one? Are they talking about the same person? In Isaiah, how do the people react to the servant? Are the people righteous? What happens to the punishment of the people's sins? If the system of animal sacrifice covered the people's sins, why does God put the sins of the people on this servant? Who crushes the servant? To what end?

Isaiah 53:4-6, Isaiah 53:10-12 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . 10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

#### Week 4: Jesus and New Birth

Friends: This week we begin looking at the life of Jesus. We will read about two incidents in his life: an interaction with a man named Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), and a situation in which he is asked to decide what to do with a woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8:2-11). Click on the

Scripture reference to see the passage.

Read both passages, then consider these questions:

- 1) The man Nicodemus, we are told, is a Pharisee. The Pharisees were very strict observers of the Jewish laws, and believed that their obeying the law made them right with God. The word "Rabbi" in John 3:2 means teacher. Given what he says in John 3:2, what does Nicodemus think about Jesus? Who does he think Jesus is? Does Nicodemus consider his statement in John 3:2 a compliment to Jesus?
- 2) In John 3:3-7, how does Jesus react to Nicodemus' statement? Do Jesus' words have any relation to what Nicodemus says in John 3:2? How does Nicodemus react in John 3:4? Does Jesus believe that Nicodemus is right with God? How can you tell from these verses?
- 3) Look at John 3:10 carefully. Are these kind words to say? Why do you think Jesus speaks this way?
- 4) In John 3:13-14, Jesus uses the term "Son of Man," referring to Himself. In John 3:14, He refers to an incident during Moses' life. The Israelites had disobeyed God, and God sent poisonous snakes among them. God commanded Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it high; anyone who was bitten by one of the snakes would live if he looked at the bronze snake. If he did not look, he would die. How is this story related to John 3:15-16?
- 5) According to John 3:16-21, who will have eternal life? Who will perish? How is this related to our discussion of Abraham last week? (Remember Genesis 15:6)
- 6) Now look at John 8:2-11. Recall that the Pharisees and scribes are Jesus' enemies. Why do they bring this woman to Him? What are they hoping to accomplish?
- 7) According to the Jewish law, this woman (and the man caught with her) deserve to die. What does Jesus say? Does He say she does not deserve to die?
- 8) Contrast Jesus' words to this woman with His words to Nicodemus. Why is He so harsh with Nicodemus? Why is He so gentle with this woman? What does Nicodemus need more than anything?

#### Week 5: The Death of Jesus

Friends: This week we will look at Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution, as told in the gospel of John. It is an amazing story; I hope you can be there. Because of our time constraints, we will not read the entire story while we are together, but will focus on John 18:1-12; John 18:28-40 John 19:1-35; 19:1-35.

Read the passage, then consider these questions:

- 1) In John 18:1-12, who is in control? Is Jesus surprised by what happens? Is Jesus arrested against His will? Does He regret that his disciples do not fight for Him? What impact does He have on those who come to arrest Him? Who is in control of the situation?
- 2) Consider Jesus' statement in John 18:11. What does Jesus mean by "the cup"? Who is "the Father"? Why would the Father give Him this cup? You may want to look back at Isaiah 53:4-6;

Isaiah 10:1-34; Isaiah 11:1-16; Isaiah 12:1-6, which we read a few weeks ago. How long had Jesus' death been planned? Who planned it?

3) Remember that the Jews are ruled by the Romans at this time. While the Jews have some autonomy, they do not have authority to execute anyone. This is why the Jewish leaders bring Jesus before the Roman governor, Pilate. During Pilate's interactions with Jesus (John 18:33-40, John 19:1-16), what is Pilate's objective? What does He believe about Jesus? Why does He agree to execute Him? Does Jesus try to defend Himself -- does He try to stop Pilate from condemning Him to death?

4) The prophecy fulfilled in John 19:24 -- that they would cast lots (like throwing dice) for his clothing -- was made in Psalms 22:1-31, which we looked at briefly a few weeks ago. This was written about 1000 years before Jesus was born. Why does the author remind us here and in John 19:28 that prophecies are fulfilled at the crucifixion?

5) In John 19:30, what is finished? The words "he gave up His spirit" were not a normal way of talking about someone's death at that time. What does the expression imply?

6) Most of those crucified died from suffocation -- their lungs fill with fluid, and they cannot push themselves high enough to get even a shallow breath. Breaking the legs of the victims would hasten the process of suffocation, since then all their weight would be on the nails in their hands. Why do the soldiers not break Jesus' legs? What do you think would happen to a soldier who mistakenly thought someone was dead, and didn't kill him? From this account, how can we be sure that Jesus died?

7) Consider this passage as a whole, and the prophecies we read earlier, going back to Genesis 3:15. Why did Jesus die willingly? Why did God allow -- even plan -- His Son's death? Consider again: What did Jesus mean by saying "It is finished"? You might want to refer to Hebrews 9:28 : "Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people."

Week 6: Jesus is Alive! This week we will look at Jesus' resurrection from the dead, as recorded in John 20:1-31. Once again, this is an amazing story, the culmination of God's plan for the Deliverer first promised to Eve in the Garden of Eden. I hope you can join us.

Read the entire passage, John 20:1-31, then consider these questions:

1) In the first two verses, what does Mary Magdalene assume has happened to the body of Jesus?

2) Who is the first person to enter the tomb? What does he see? Read John 20:6-7 carefully. If someone had stolen the body, what would have happened to the linen strips and facecloth?

3) In John 20:8-9, what does the other disciple (John himself, the author of the book) believe after entering the tomb?

4) Who is the first person to see Jesus alive? What is unusual about this?

5) In John 20:19, what is the condition of the ten disciples? What is their state of mind? How does that change after Jesus appears?

6) What is Thomas' reaction when he hears of Jesus' appearance? Why do you think he says this? You might want to look at John 11:16. What does Jesus eventually do for Thomas? Does Thomas put his hand in Jesus' side? Does he believe?

7) In John 20:30-31, what is the reason John has written this book? What is the impact of believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Look back at John 3:16.

8) Why does God raise Jesus from the dead? If Jesus really died for the sins of all believers (as prophesied in Isaiah 53:1-12), why is it important for God to raise Him? Wouldn't the penalty for sin still be paid?

9) Recall the sequence of events that we have studied: God's creation of the entire universe, making it good; God's placing of the first man and the first woman in a garden where they had everything they needed, and God only asked them to trust Him, and obey because of their trust in Him; man's disobedience, believing Satan's lies, thereby destroying his fellowship with God and with other men; God's promise that a descendant, a true man, would crush the head of Satan; God's call to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the promise that through their descendant all the nations of the world will be blessed; God's prophesy through Isaiah that this descendant will suffer and die, taking upon Himself the sins of the people; Jesus' death on the cross, fulfilling the prophecies of ages past, taking the sins of all believers upon Himself; and now Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Do you see how this is all one story, from the beginning of mankind through the resurrection of Jesus? Do you see how God used people over the course of thousands of years to bring about His purposes? What is your response to this story -- the story of God's paying the penalty for sin, the story of God's bringing to Himself a forgiven, perfected people?

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