BE HOLY TO ME

Leviticus 18, 20

Key Verse: 20:26

“You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.”

Thank God for helping to study about the Day of Atonement and the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. These all point to Jesus’ death on the cross and his shed blood for the atonement of man’s sins, appeasing God’s wrath and so bringing propitiation/peace with God. It is once for all in eternity. In this grace of God, who is holy, he wants his people to be holy to him. Let’s think about this in today’s passage.

In 18:1-3, The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘I am the LORD your God. 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.” At that time, the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan were like the whole world and their way of living was the trend of the world. Yet, they were at the verge of God’s judgment because of their sins. God said to Abraham in Genesis 15:16, “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” God’s plan was that Abraham’s descendants would be in Egypt for four hundred years plus and come out of Egypt as a nation with enough population and back to the land of Canaan through the conquest of this land . This would be God’s punishment upon the Canaanites including the Amorites when their sin had reached its full measure. God had this whole plan for the Israelites. Now in the desert the people of God had not settled. It was before entering the land of Canaan. At this point, God’s command was that their doing be different from the doing of Egyptians and Canaanites. They were not to follow what they had seen and what would see. God spoke of what they must not do and then speaks of what they must do. In verses 4 and 5, “You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.” Here we see God’s heart for his people that they may live as they follow and keep and obey his laws and decrees. If they follow the ways of the world, their lives would be deadened. God’s laws and decrees are different from human ways. What to follow is the matter of life or death. God said in Deuteronomy 30:19-20, “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life…” Truly our attitude toward the words of God determines our lives, our future and eternal destiny. Obedience to the word of God out of loving God is the way of life, however the world changes.

In verses 6-23, the unlawful sextual relations are listed concretely, describing 18 cases. Verse 6 says, “No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD.” This is a general description, which is followed by 15 cases of illicit sexual relations between a man and a woman, the case between a man and a man, and the case of a man or a woman with an animal and sacrificing a child to Molech. The words in these verses are even hard to read, and we can wonder whether these are God’s words. Yet, these are certainly the words of God, and the LORD God knows the sinfulness of human beings and how vulnerable they are and how far they can go until they become like animals. We are to know that sexual corruption is the result of spiritual corruption. Spiritual prostitution is followed by physical prostitution. Spiritual deterioration brings physical deterioration. Paul expressed it this way in Romans 1:24, 26-27, “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another…God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” The phrase, “gave them over,” indicates the wrath of God being poured out, when the people did not acknowledge God and ignored the words of God. In Noah’s time ,when people’s view of marriage was distorted and moral corruption increased beyond control, God had to bring the deluge to end such a world. God also punished the sexual perversion of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire. The sexual corruption of our time seems be worse amid the most technological advancement in human intellectual power. According to God’s warning, his judgment is at hand.

Here, the LORD says in verses 24-25, “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. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.” What an interesting expression! When the people became defiled, the land where they lived was also defiled. The innocent land had to take the sin of the people and it became the sin of the land, and the land was punished for its sin and vomited out its inhabitants. It seems that the people and the land of their living cannot be separated. God punished the people by punishing the land, that vomited its inhabitants out of it. I heard of a story that mango trees were unfruitful in a land when its inhabitants were sinning against God, but when the whole townspeople repented, the mango trees became very fruitful again. It is good to know that man’s sin defiles the land, and products from the defiled land can be toxic causing diseases like atopy. Undoubtedly it is an expression of the wrath of God, who is living. We are to know that the whole creation is connected together in a ecosystem.

The LORD continues in verses 26-28, “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, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.” God’s way of working would be the same in history. There is no favoritism in God. And even an alien can receive the blessing with the native-born when they follow God’s way. And in verse 29, “Everyone who does any of these detestable things—such persons must be cut off from their people.” Keeping God’s law is also a personal matter. According to Revelation 11:18, God will destroy those who destroy the earth. It is none other than sinners who destroy the earth. In our time, people celebrate Earth Day on April 22 each year, and try to preserve the earth. But according to the Bible, the way to preserve the earth is sinners’ repentance. When the people become proud, the land will get more and more defiled. The earth is eventually destroyed because of man’s sin, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth after Christ’s kingdom on the earth.

Then the LORD says in verse 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.” This chapter began with the words, “I am the LORD” and ends with the same phrase, “I am the LORD.” In the middle, these words are written in verse 5, “the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD,” in verse 6, “No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD”, “and in verse 21, “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.” In these expressions the LORD God really wants his people to be different as those who were brought out of Egypt and now belong to him, the LORD. At the present they seem to be not much different from the people of the world as those who had lived in Egypt as slaves for a long time and must have been embed in such a terrible life. But God’s hope for them was amazing that they would be set apart from the custom of the world and become a holy nation keeping God’s laws and decrees.

In chapter 20:1-5, the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail to put him to death, I will set my face against that man and his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech.” Children of God’s people are children of God’s promise who would continue the history of God. Molech is the detestable god of the people of Ammon according to 2 Kings 23:13. It has a man’s body and the head of an ox, sitting with stretched arms. It is made of bronze and empty inside. After putting the fire inside and burning it, they put a baby in the arms and let the baby offered being burned. It is truly none other than Satan’s work. Offering children to Molech was unthinkable, especially to the people of God. However, the people would go that far as they abandoned the LORD.

In verse 6, the LORD says, "I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people.” And in verse 27 the LORD says, “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.” Again, God’s treats spiritual prostitution seriously.

Then he says in verses 7, 8, “Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.” No one can make himself or herself holy. It is God who makes his people as they keep his decrees and follow them. It is as Jesus prayed for his disciples, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (Jn 17:17). Those who are in Christ Jesus are to know that they have been made holy through the sacrifice of body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb 10:10). Based on this grace of Jesus we can grow in holiness through the obedience to the words of God.

Then in verses 10-21, there are 12 cases of sexual sin with God’s punishment. In chapter 18, God commanded not to indulge in unlawful sexual relations, and in this chapter God’s punishment for such sins are clearly mentioned. The death penalty could be applied. In one case, God says in verse 10, “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbour—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.” Some may think, “Does such a crime deserve death?” Yet, again this shows God’s holiness that abhors sin.

In verses 22-23, he says, “Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them.” What he abhors and hates is very clear.

Here, we see that God did not give his laws to the nations of the world. God just destroyed them when their sins reached its full measure. However, he treated his people differently by setting his laws and decrees so that they might not be destroyed but live by them. Moses said in Deuteronomy 4:6-8, “Observe them carefully, for this will show you wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’…What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?” God’s laws and decrees were certainly the expression of his deep concern and love for them. God’s chosen people, whom God set apart from the nations of the world, are different in that they have God’s laws. It is a tremendous blessing that we have the Bible, which are the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. What truly matters is one’s attitude toward the Bible, which is the greatest blessing given to mankind.

Then in verses 24-27, the LORD says, “But I said to you, ‘You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD our God, who has set you apart from the nations.” He continues, “You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground—those which I have set apart as unclean for you.” God’s teaching concerning cleanness and uncleanness started from chapter 11 and ends in this chapter. Finally, he says, “You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.” In light of the whole Bible, those whom God set apart from the nations to be his own are the ones who are in Christ Jesus through their repentance of their sins and faith in Christ Jesus. So Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:13-16, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

Being holy includes having the right concept of sex and marriage. Jesus said in Matthew 19:4-5, “‘Haven’t you read’, he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?”’” Jesus clearly confirmed the Genesis truth.

As we studied, people of this world are so consumed with food and sex, which are specifically dealt with in Leviticus 11-20. Those who are created anew in Christ Jesus are to live differently. They are to be a holy community, a holy nation.

A holy nation starts with a holy family. A holy family is the first building block of a holy community and a holy nation. The family is to honor God as God and glorify him in their practical lives, eating for the glorify of God, knowing that eating can be a means of serving others. A holy family is to keep spiritual purity in relation to God and to keep the purity between the spouses in the fear of the LORD and respecting each other and developing spiritual fellowship between the two. And the parents are to raise their children in the godly ways to be godly offsprings as God said in Malachi 2:15, “…Because he was seeking godly offspring.” There is a beautiful song, “A Christian Home”, which goes, “O give us homes where Christ is Lord and Master, The Bible read, the precious hymns still sung; where prayer comes first in peace or in disaster, And praise is natural speech to every tongue; Where mountains move before a faith that’s vaster, And Christ sufficient is for old and young.”

Thank God for his words. What we studied are the words of God. May we fight against the sinful trend of the world and make every effort to live by the words of God and be holy to him, who saved us and made us his people through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. May we serve his purpose of being a holy nation with godly homes one by one.