

LIVING UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF GOD

Leviticus 18–20

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Today we're going to take a major block of the Book of Leviticus—chapters 18, 19, and 20. Leave your Bible open to those three chapters and I'm going to read some selected verses from each of those chapters, which give the underlying principles to the chapter. Let me start by reading 18:1–5 and 19:1 and 20:7. “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. 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”’...The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy...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”’” (NIV).

These chapters are at the beginning of the fourth major section of the Book of Leviticus.

Chapters 1–7, the laws of the offerings. Chapters 8–10, the law of the priesthood. Chapters 11–16, the laws of purification. Chapter 17 through the end of the book, laws of purification or holiness, guidelines for practical living.

We might put in focus what is happening in these three chapters before we look specifically at the content of each.

Leviticus 18, after the verses of principles, verses 1–5, mainly deals with prohibited sexual relationships. There are at least five categories of prohibited sexual relationships in chapter 18.

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Prohibited sexual relationships within family, verses 6–18—laws of incest. Within marriage, verse 19. Outside of marriage, verse 20. Homosexuality, verse 22. Sex with animals, verse 23.

Leviticus 18 also has one brief verse that forbids the Israelites to offer children in sacrifice to the god Molech, 18:21. That’s a fascinating verse because periodically you’ll hear the question arise as to whether or not the Lord would allow an infant go to hell or do infants go to heaven. One answer to that is if in the Old Testament God told his people that they couldn’t offer their children in fire to the god Molech, it would be inconceivable that the God who forbade the Israelites to offer children in fire would at the same time turn around and have children given to eternal fires. It’s logically inconsistent.

Leviticus 18 deals basically with prohibited sexual relationships.

Leviticus 20 deals with the punishments that apply to the violations that are described in Leviticus 18. In other words Leviticus 20 matches Leviticus 18. Leviticus 18 spells out what is wrong. Leviticus 20 spells out the punishments for all the things that are wrong in Leviticus 18. In Leviticus 19 you have some regulations that have to do with our relationship to God and our relationship to our neighbors. There are thirty-two specific regulations in Leviticus 19 that apply to our relationship to God and our love for our neighbor. I’ve called these three chapters, “Living Under the Authority of God.” That’s exactly what is the focus of this part of God’s Word. It’s not only a part of God’s Word that came to the Israelites thirty-four hundred years ago, but it’s a part of God’s Word that comes to us today. I’ve taken these three chapters and divided them into three major headings of how we live under the authority of God as we take these chapters.

I. The first theme is living under the authority of God in sexual relationships.

There are two things basically that I want to speak of in this section—incest and homosexuality, which are the focus really of chapter 18.

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A. In regard to incest in verses 6–18 there are eleven different family relationships where sexual relationships are forbidden. A man with his mother, stepmother, sister or half-sister, step-sister, granddaughter, aunt, aunt by marriage, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, step-daughter, and step-granddaughter. The prohibition of the father-daughter relationship is not mentioned but it is assumed by all Mideastern cultures and most likely the prohibitions in verses 6–18 were prohibitions that were violated both in Egypt and in Canaan and that is why they are prohibited here. Whereas the father-daughter relationship was prohibited both in Egypt and in Canaan and therefore is not mentioned although that relationship is specifically condemned in Genesis 19. It's interesting when you look at Egypt, out of which the Children of Israel were coming, the whole failed family were a story that made kind of a soap opera for American media today—the story of family incest and family relationships throughout the royal family of Egypt.

God here in these verses is expressing His attitude toward incest. Again I recognize in going through Scripture systematically I come across themes I wouldn't normally speak on. One of the things in going systematically—it forces us all to encounter all of God's Word. There are parts of it frankly that we would rather leave alone. Some would even raise the question as to whether the pulpit is an appropriate place to talk about incest anyway.

I think it is appropriate to speak of it because God does in His Word. There are most likely persons in this audience that are victims of incest. As the years go by it seems the incidents of incest are increasing in terms of the counseling I do. Nationally and perhaps worldwide the frequency of incest is increasing at an alarming rate. It is becoming a serious plague on the American scene. Masters, in his book *Patterns of Incest*, says, “Of all the arguments to be presented against incest this one seems the most forceful: the family would be disrupted and in some cases destroyed with members permitted sexual access to one another. Sexual rivalries with

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consequent hatreds which spring up in some cases, incentives to exploitation would be maximal, deterrents minimal, roles within the family would be confused, and discipline would be difficult or impossible to impose. The always precious harmony of the family unit would not survive the tension.” A modern psychiatrist saying what the Scriptures have said in Leviticus 18:6–20.

What should be done in regard to incest? I think as a church body we need to pray that we as a church family could minister to the victims of incest, to persons who have been hurt by perhaps the most damaging emotional thing a person could ever go through.

Louise Armstrong writes her book called *Kiss Daddy Goodnight*, she is herself a victim of incest. She gives accounts of incest victims. The common trait through the book was the hopelessness of ever making a full emotional recovery. There is a tremendous presence of anger and depression. No matter how deep the loss, how deep the trauma, we believe that when Jesus Christ has come He has come to announce good news to the captive and He’s come to set the prisoner free.

We believe as Christians that no matter how a person has been victimized in their past life and even in their family experience that Jesus Christ can break the psychological and emotional chains that imprison that person in anger and depression and set them free. One of the things that we as a church family need to be sensitive about: Many times we will not even be aware that we have an opportunity to minister to someone who has a deep hurt in life. We need to be aware as we gather and as the Holy Spirit is among us that He is constantly here to heal and to bind up the brokenhearted and to set prisoners free. As the church we ought to pray and ask for God to give us a special ministry and sensitivity to those who have been hurt in the deepest areas of life including the area of incest.

I think we also need to recognize that this can happen in the Christian community. It happened in Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 5, a man was living with his father’s wife. Paul tells the church

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how to deal with it. He says we're not to be silent about it. He says we're to put responsibility on the wrongdoer. One of the facets of incest is many times blame is put on the wrong person, the innocent—the wife or the child—when it really belongs on the wrongdoer. He puts the blame on the wrongdoer. He demands that a change be made and then that grace be regained through repentance if there is repentance.

B. The second area of troubled sexuality of Leviticus 18 that I'll just note briefly is the area of homosexuality, 18:22: "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman. That is abominable [or "detestable"]." And again 20:13, "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death. Their blood will be on their own heads." One may ask at a Scripture like this, "Why is God in the bedroom anyway? Isn't it possible in our day between two consenting adults that anything is permissible?"

The reason why God is involved in our intimate personal life is that He created us in His image. The Scripture says, "God created man in his own image...male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). That is, maleness and femaleness together equals man created in the image of God. Homosexuality is not fitting anatomically nor theologically. It breaks the image that God has made that man and woman together equals man in God's image. Male plus male cannot equal the image of God. It's male and female together equaling the image of God. Therefore this union is a distortion of the character and nature of God. God is telling His people that sexual morality is to set them off from their neighbors. It's to set them off as God's people. In fact, twenty-four times in chapters 18, 19 and 20 God says, "I am the LORD" or "I am your God." He spells this out saying that His bondedness to His people has created a special identity with Him and they are therefore not to adopt the ways of the world or the ways of others.

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The reason why a Christian and why a minister must speak out on homosexuality is there is no hope for the homosexual unless the homosexual repents. The same as there is no hope for the adulterer, there is no room for a liar, there is no room for anyone who continues to insist on remaining in sin and still have God. Repentance is necessary. The claim is increasingly made today that homosexuality is an orientation that is natural.

The New Testament determines what applies to all people and all cultures versus those things which specifically apply to Israel. Whenever you find anything in the Old Testament that is reinforced in the New Testament then the New Testament is lifting it out of the narrow cultural mold of Israel and bringing it into the cross-cultural code of the world. There are a number of things like hybrid seed and woven clothes and the like that are not spoken of in the New Testament. Therefore we understand that Christ did not as a universal principle establish that, rather, that principle was given for a limited time to teach a lesson to the people of Israel in regard to the holiness or separateness of God. But when in the New Testament you find a moral principle that is repeated, that is found in the Old Testament, you have an enduring principle that applies to all people of all times.

It's raised that this is asking for people who have violated this be put to death. The response from the New Testament is we are taught that we are no longer the state; that the church is totally divorced from the aspect of punishment in our society; and that in the Old Testament God's people were both a religious faith as well as a state—a theocracy. But in the New Testament we are a believing community and we leave laws and enforcement of laws to the state. We may lobby for laws but the punishment is not passed out by the church. It's passed out by the state. So all the laws of punishment in Leviticus 20 don't really apply here and now. It's up to the state to determine and a Christian submits to the state.

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We are saying as we look at Scripture, the reason why God condemns the activity is it does not model His image and whatever doesn't model His image He wants to correct. He knows that we can never truly be inwardly whole unless we are modeling His image in us.

The cure for homosexuality really is to assume personal responsibility. Homosexuality is not genetics. It's not God. It's not "Mother or father made them that way," although there could have been family influences that had a great part. In the last analysis, if he's ever to come out of homosexuality, he must admit that at some point along the line he had a participatory choice in it. They had a choice to get in even though the cultural and environmental and family factors would seem almost overbearing. If there is a choice to get in there is a choice to be made to get out. We must as Christians insist in our day that homosexuality is not like being left-handed or right-handed, but that is one of the great lies the enemy is putting on our day, to tell people that they have to remain hopelessly locked in to a deviant sexual behavior.

The second thing that goes with that, as in the case of all sin, is repentance. It is involved in the question, "Do you want to be whole?" If we can respond, "Yes, Lord I want to be whole," God is free to begin working in our life.

Another step is responsible counseling by competent Christians. Another is a loving and supportive body of Christ. I think that's the kind of body the Corinthian church had. Even though they had a lot of problems there were a lot of people in that church who came from incredible sorts of background. Male prostitutes, homosexuals, idolaters, robbers, thieves and the like. Yet they found in the body of Jesus Christ loving acceptance. Not the loving acceptance which is permissive and says anything goes. But the loving acceptance that realizes when a person is wanting to make changes in their life that God is there with His grace and we as God's people are there with grace as well to minister and to help.

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Louis Goldberg in his commentary on Leviticus 18 said, “God has woven His absolute standards into the fabric of men. God never intended these laws to be harsh. Rather the Lord wanted man, His highest creation, to enjoy life, family, children and society in ways that bring joy to the heart rather than grief or sorrow. Therefore God cared for His people Israel and wanted to create an island of godliness and desirable morality in the Middle East that would attract the pagan to something better than they had.”

Living under the authority of God in sexual relationships.

II. A second major category is living under the authority of God in loyalty to Him.

Some of these principles are principles that Jesus lifts out and makes universal. Some of them fall by the way because they only are for Israel in the Old Testament. You can determine as you go through them which are related to Israel for a time and which are meant for all time. No idols, no false swearing. In the Old Testament days a person might say, “I’m going to do this,” and to affirm they’re going to do it they would say, “I affirm in the name of God that I will do it.” If they didn’t intend to do it or broke that they were taking the name of the Lord in vain. A person today can take the name of the Lord in vain when they pass themselves off as doing business as a Christian but maybe don’t do a good job at all. But the name of Christ is getting them money. If one uses the name of Christ to get work then one better be sure the Lord’s name is not being taken in vain.

Leviticus 19:5–8 deals with the proper use of the peace offering. We don’t have the peace offering any more but there is a really neat thing in that little section that says after the third day they couldn’t eat the meat of the peace offering. That’s significant because the peace offering was the happiest offering. It was the thanksgiving offering where all the family would set down and have thanksgiving together. The neat thing is it couldn’t be eaten on the third day. I think

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maybe the principle being established is you can't go on living on past experiences so don't save your meat week after week, day after day. Have your joyous experience and pass on and get ready for the next experience. Don't cling to the past.

There is the avoidance of the occult in verses 26,31, about staying away from witches and the like. There is abstaining from blood, verse 26. That was taught in Leviticus 17. They were also to abstain from identifying with pagan gods. Verses 27, 28 include some strange regulations: "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." The reason why this prohibition was given was that in Canaan some people had haircuts and beard cuts and tattoos that were marks of honor to pagan gods. When a person died their body was marked in honor of that God. The children of Israel were told not to even have the appearance of loyalty to one of the pagan gods.

They were to offer first-fruits to God, verses 23–25. Plant a tree and don't eat of it for five years and finally the fifth year after giving the fourth year to God, the fifth year you can eat from the tree. Then avoid pagan forms of worship, verse 29.

III. The third area of living under authority is living under authority of God and love for our neighbor.

The key principle from the heart of the Old Testament is Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Words that our Lord Himself quotes. It's interesting that we are told to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our soul, with all of our strength. We're to love our neighbor as ourselves. Never are we told to love God as we love ourselves. We are told to love our neighbor as we love ourselves but we're not told to love God as we love ourselves. The reason is we are to have a greater love for God than we have for

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ourselves. We're not to limit our love for God by self-love. We're to have a love for God that gets beyond self-love. That's why Jesus teaches in Mark 8:34–35, "If any man would come after me he must first deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever will save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it." If I love myself, I'm trying to fulfill myself not deny myself. If I love myself I'm trying to save my life not lose it. But Jesus says our love for God goes beyond love for neighbor.

In talking about love for neighbor there are a number of subprinciples under this in chapters 19 and 20. Duties of parents. You might think it's rather strange that any normal natural parent would ever offer their child to a god of fire, lay their child on a heathen altar and let the child be burned up before their eyes. What kind of a parent would put their child to the fire? Why would they do that? The reason why they did it is because they believed that if they gave their child in the fire to Molech then Molech would increase their crops and give them greater prosperity. By offering their child they would have greater prosperity. Has that principle died off? Do people still offer up their children in order to secure more personal prosperity? How about being so busy that we shun our children aside, pushing our children so hard to satisfy your own ego, making them adults before they're ready, sacrificing them to the TV god so we can be more free to do our thing. Any application? Are the people who offer their children to Molech really all that strange? We just have a slower form of death in our culture.

Duties of children: Revere and respect their parents, 19:3. And do not curse their parents, 20:9. No matter what kind of parents their parents have been, don't curse them. I think this is the key to healing, where a person has been badly violated or hurt as a child. The key in dealing with the anger and resentment is to ask the Lord to bring a forgiving heart and a forgiving mentality.

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Other areas of relationships. Business life. Paying wages. “Don’t hold back the wages of a hired man overnight,” 19:13. Why? Because in those days a person worked on a day to day income. If he worked a day then at the end of the day he ought to get paid. If he doesn’t get paid he won’t have anything to feed his family. So don’t hold his wages back overnight. Pay your bills on time is basically what this is saying. Pay your employees on time.

There is a whole lot of defrauding that goes on in this world. People defrauding people out of money. People that turn deals, cutting deals oblivious to the personal or family welfare of a person just to make the almighty dollar. They’ll do anything to make it no matter who they have to trample on. One of our beliefs as Christians is we know there will be a day of judgment when God will make a person realize the consequences of what they’ve done. As Christians we recognize that God will hold us all accountable, and that evil will not go continually unchecked. In business life persons were told to have honest scales, verses 35–36, that they didn’t weigh things out in a different proportion to what they really were. Life in society at large. Financial honesty. Verbal honesty. Caring for the handicapped. Integrity. Leviticus 19:15 says don’t show partiality to the poor because they’re poor. In a court of justice just because the person is poor don’t throw the case his way. On the other hand don’t show deference to the great. Don’t say because they’ve got a name and title, a lot of money, or a big position, you’ll show deference to them. But have equal justice for all.

Amicable neighbor relationships. We’re not to endanger one another’s lives. No hatred.

Rebuking where necessary. Not carrying vengeance. Verses 20–22 teach we must regard persons not as property but as persons. Respect for the aged, verse 32. And incredibly in 33–34 the thing that really applies to southern California: “When an alien lives with you in your land do not mistreat him or her. This person living with you must be treated as one of your native-born

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citizens. Love him as yourself. For you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” Right treatment of aliens. We are to love all persons including persons who “don’t belong here.”

There are a whole lot of regulations in these three chapters. What is it that motivates us to the behavior that lives under the authority of God? There is some motivational matter in these chapters. It is this: “I am the Lord your God. Therefore don’t live like your past neighbors did, in Egypt. And don’t be like your future neighbors in Canaan. I am the Lord your God. I do things differently. I, the Lord your God, am holy. Consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am the Lord your God.” Why are the children of Israel to behave as they were to behave? Because that’s the way God would behave and they’re to be motivated by the way God would live his life out in terms of human flesh. Why do we behave as we do?

Why do you behave as you do? If you were to make a list of why you’re doing what you’re doing what would you say?

There’s a great difference between moving and motivation. Moving is going through the motions. It’s doing what is expected. It is performing. Performing even satisfactorily. Whereas motivation is doing something because deep inside of me I really want to do it. I really want to achieve it. I really want to be this way.

When I look sometimes in my own Christian experience I ask myself am I only going through the motions or am I inwardly motivated? Am I doing what I’m doing out of fear of punishment, out of the hope of heaven, or the fear of hell? Or am I doing what I’m doing because someone else expects it of me and it’s someone’s opinion so I behave well because other people expect it of me.

What the Lord is asking His people to do in these chapters is to go beyond simply moving, going through the motions. But to gain an inward motivation that says, “I am the LORD your God.” I do

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this because of God. Has anyone ever been so special to you that you've said, "I'd do anything for them." That's what God is asking us to do in these chapters. That is why many people so misread the Mosaic law. They think the Mosaic law is just one rule that God is setting down after another. But what is laid down is the result of God's love and care and concern for His people. It's because He wants them to really live free that He gives His law. When we have violated His law and realized we can't keep it He then goes beyond that to give us His grace. We're to be motivated by love and concern for Him.

What really is to motivate our behavior according to Scripture is not the fear of getting into trouble or the fear of somebody else's opinion or even the fear of eternal loss but it is the love for God which is in our hearts that gets a hold of us and seizes us and says, "I'd do anything for God. He has redeemed me. He has brought me from Egypt. He is bringing me to Canaan. I am one of His people. I am on the way and I want to love and respond to Him."

Closing Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, we come to You today grateful in our hearts that You have made us Your own people, Your own special people. We who were outside of Your family have been adopted as Your sons and Your daughters. We realize as we listen to the content of a message like this that we live in a world of confused values. A world where right is no longer right and wrong is right. A world that is often upside down in its thinking. A world that is increasingly telling us that morals and responsibilities are not outside of us in some authoritative law, but they're in us and whatever we feel is the best at any particular moment is what is right. Lord, because You love us so much You're telling us that we cannot guide our life dependent upon what we feel like but You've painted directions on roads down the pathway of life. You've given us no passing signs and You've given us avoid danger signs. And You've given us signs of curves and slow

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down signs and You've given us stop signs. You've given us green lights too. You've given us speed limits. All this You've done because You love us and because You want to protect us as we travel under Your care. We bring our lives to You Lord in these special areas we mention this morning. We'd especially pray, Lord, for those persons in here that are going through a difficult time in their own inward emotion because of a previous bad family experience. Maybe a person here that has been a victim of family abuse. We pray that whether that abuse was physical or strictly mental that You would bring Your healing presence and that You would put a seed of faith in that individual's life now to realize that You are the one who has come to bind up the brokenhearted and to set the captive free. And You also will bind the strong man so that he can no longer hurt or damage them outwardly or inwardly in their heart of hearts. We pray for all the areas in which we may have struggles in our life between right and wrong. We were tempted even this past week to walk outside of Your will and do something which for the moment would appear to give a lot of satisfaction but which we know from the long term consequences is so wrong to You and would be so wrong for us. We bring ourselves once more to the cross where You died, where Your struggle against sin was so intense that You went to death for us to deliver us from the curse of death in our own life. We, with our own passions and temptation and struggles in life, struggles with people and emotions and all those kind of things would go again to the cross with You and would ask for You to nail to the cross that in us which is unworthy and unlike You and renew our hearts and spirits so that we may know You as the Lord holy in our lives and the Lord who makes us holy. Renew our hearts, O Lord, and truly make us in our inward character Your people ever day, every minute loving You, serving You. We ask in Your name. Amen.