

# Approaching God

*Leviticus*

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As I said, we're here to take a look at the book of Leviticus tonight and I'm so glad that you all made it out on a chilly evening to be with us. Thank you for your faithfulness to God's word. You know, I'm just increasingly convinced the more that we go along month by month that those of you that are faithful to be under the word of God week by week, the cumulative impact of what's coming over the next year or two is really going to be explosive on your spiritual life and I'm excited not only to be able to teach it but I'm excited about what God is going to continue to do in your lives as you are faithful to be with God's people when God's word is taught. He could only bless us if we do that, right? He could only be faithful to us if we are faithful to what he has revealed and so this is a great time together and I'm very excited to have this time with you here this evening from the book of Leviticus.

If you've ever tried to read the Bible cover to cover, I would venture to say that you could picture Leviticus a little bit like a ship that is sailing and suddenly comes on some turbulence and then maybe the ship hits the rocks and it breaks apart. Your intentions to read the Bible cover to cover more than one time for some people, have fallen into ruin on the rocks of the book of Leviticus because at one level, it's kind of a dry book, at least it would seem that way to us. There's not much narrative. There is not a plot to hold your attention. It's talking about sacrificial rites that are unfamiliar to us and it's easy to just kind of get bogged down, "Now, where is the grain offering supposed to go on the skillet?" and all of that and your mind just goes and it doesn't really grasp why this is even in the Bible sometimes. Well, tonight will cure you of that. Tonight you're going to have, I believe, a fresh look at Leviticus that is going to be just as vibrant as our studies in other parts of Scripture. What we want to do tonight is see a very big picture of Leviticus and at one level, we're going to be dealing with it at such a simple superficial level that you'll say, "Well, I could have seen that for myself." But we need help to bring these things out and to see exactly what it means because by the end of the evening, what's going to be settled in your heart is a much clearer picture of the significance of what Jesus Christ did when he purchased our salvation, and the whole reason that it was a bloody sacrifice of Christ that was necessary to redeem us, is going to be evident and there is just so much here. It's really remarkable.

So what I want to start out with here if you're going to take notes, I'm going to give you five points this evening, and I just want to start with point 1: the context of Leviticus. The context of Leviticus. Knowing where you're at in the Scriptures, knowing where you're at in the progress of this revelation, is immensely helpful to understand and there are just little bookends that make it all very plain. First of all, understand and remember that Leviticus is the third of the five books of Moses. It is not a stand-alone unit of Scripture that can be removed from those five books and studied by itself, really. You need to remember that it's part of the whole context of the great book of the law, the great book of Moses, so Leviticus is built on Genesis and it is built on Exodus, that's really important to realize. And so chronologically, Leviticus follows immediately after the events of the book of Exodus that we looked at two weeks ago. Exodus covered a period of 430 years or more. Leviticus covers one month. One month in contrast to 430 years.

I want you to be able to see this. Look at the end of the book of Exodus 40:17. I just want you to see this chronological book end. I find these kinds of things helpful to just get a picture of what's going on. Exodus 40:17. We'll get the rock rolling downhill and it will pick up momentum as we go along. Exodus 40:17, "Now in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected." Okay, the first month of the second year on the first day of the month, that's how Exodus ends. Now, turn over to the first verse of the book of Numbers just on the other side of Leviticus. I just want you to see chronology here, that's all. We're just trying to find the lay of the land for what's happening. So in Numbers 1:1 it says, "The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting," watch this, "on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt." So Numbers is the first of the second month, Exodus ended on the first of the first month, and so Leviticus falls in the middle of that in a one month period. God gives all of this revelation and requirements to Moses in a short period of time, and so if it seems like there's not much progress in the narrative in Leviticus when you read through it, there is a reason for that, there's not much chronological progress at all. So Leviticus tells us what happened immediately after Exodus.

Now turn to Leviticus 1:1, and we're not at all going to say everything that could be said about Leviticus. Not at all but Leviticus 1:1, "Then the LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying." Okay? So here's all I want you to see from this, very simple right at this point: you have the LORD and that should be in all caps in your Bibles, the LORD, that name, Yahweh, which was revealed for the first time in Exodus 3, you have the man Moses, you have the tent of meeting and so you see from the very first verse of Leviticus it is presupposing everything that came prior to it in the book of Exodus. So there is a connection to be made. What we have here is that God has given birth to the nation of Israel in the book of Exodus and now in Leviticus he is giving them the manner, the laws and the regulations of their sacrifices and their life laws that is supposed to govern them as a nation. And here's the thing, look at it Exodus 40:34, here's why Leviticus is necessary: God, a holy God has taken up residence among his nation. Exodus 40:34, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their

journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel."

The God who had powerfully delivered them from Egypt, had brought the 10 plagues upon Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea and brought them safe to the other side, that great and mighty and powerful God was now living in their midst. His presence was being manifested in the midst of this people and what you need to understand, what makes you start to understand the purpose of the book of Leviticus, is that that's a really significant, we could even say it's a heavy matter to deal with because this God of great glory, this God of great power, is now present with them and, beloved, look, that's a problem. That's a problem because that God is holy. That God is holy but the people are sinful. This is like oil and water being put together. Those two elements do not mix. How can it be that these people are not crushed, are not exterminated, are not incinerated by the very presence of God in their midst? You see, here's the thing: when we're just kind of casually reading through the Scriptures, sometimes the weight of what's being said doesn't always fall upon us; we don't realize the significance of it and the attendant circumstances and the meaning of what's going on. God is in their midst. How are we going to deal with that? We can't just assume that everything is okay knowing that God is holy, and the book of Leviticus deals with that.

So that's just the opening salvo here, the context of Leviticus. What I want to do now as we shift into another thematic aspect of Leviticus is to talk point 2 about the holiness of the Lord. The holiness of the Lord. Leviticus addresses the problem of the people having a holy God in their midst. To state it differently, how are these people going to approach this God that is among them, who is with them? And what I want you to see is that Leviticus emphasizes the holiness of the Lord in a way that calls for a response from the people. The fact that God is holy and they are now his people and they are now a nation means that life changes as a result. Things don't go on like they were in a pagan nation, when they were slaves in a pagan nation. Everything changes now that God has burst upon the scene, as it were; now that God has made his presence known. Now that God is with them, everything changes and there is a weight to this. There is a magnitude to this that goes beyond human comprehension, that goes beyond human interaction. There is so much that is involved with the reality of the presence of the Lord. Here's what I'm trying to say, why I didn't say this five minutes ago, I don't know: the presence of the Lord amongst a people is no casual matter. This is not a minor occurrence. The holy, uncreated God of the universe is now manifest amongst these people. Something has to give. Something has to be done about this, and the holiness of the Lord, Leviticus emphasizes and I just want to show you a few passages. All I can do is really point you to a few passages tonight and read them and try to stitch together the connection of what you're seeing.

Leviticus 11:44. The holiness of God creates demands upon his people. The holiness of God creates demands upon his people. Leviticus 11:44 where God says, "I am the LORD

your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy." Do you see the consequences? "I am holy, therefore you must be holy. You consecrate yourself. Set yourself apart for my service because I am a God who is separate from my creation. I am separate from sin." And there starts to, you know, mentally speaking, the ground starts to shake under your feet here. There is some quivering that's going on because this God has manifested himself and Leviticus refers to this on multiple occasions.

Turn over to chapter 19, verse 1, "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel.'" He says, "Speak to the whole congregation. Speak to the nation because this has national implications. This has implications for the whole 2-3 million of you." Verse 2, "'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'" Chapter 20, verse 26, turn over a page or two in your Bibles. I just want you to see the themes. Leviticus 20:26, "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." Now, God is not playing around. He's not messing around here. This is not incidental. This is not casual. God says, "You are my people and I am a holy God and that means that things have to happen amongst you. There has to be a manifestation of holiness in you as well because you're my people and I, the Lord your God, am holy." And there's a hush, there's a quiet, there's a solemnity that falls upon your mind as you realize what's going on here. Leviticus 22:31, "So you shall keep My commandments, and do them; I am the LORD. You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel; I am the LORD who sanctifies you, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, to be your God; I am the LORD."

Now, let's take a little moment to pause here. You can have a sense if you're starting to understand this, you can have a checkpoint for whether you're grasping what's being said from God's word here tonight if you find that there is a sense of the fear of the Lord welling up within you. Proverbs says multiple times, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The fear of the Lord keeps one from evil; that there is a respect, there is a reverence, there is a holy sanctified love for God that reveres him, that esteems him, that honors him because of who he is. And this, of course, is trivialized in today's church with all of the entertainment and video clips and all of that, but what I want you to see is that when we read the word of God and just let it speak for what it is, there is a sense of awesomeness and a fear that comes upon you when you read this. God has just delivered them by a mighty outstretched hand. They walked through walls of water on either side on dry ground and so now this God who has miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt is now asserting himself, is making himself known, saying, "This is who I am," and that has impact on you. So as we read it now today, even 3,500 years later, we start to realize that there are serious themes, there is a serious matter that's going on here that humbles us, that sobers us up and says, "I need to listen to this with a humble repentant heart because God is making himself known," emphasizing his holiness, and he is holy in the sense that he is unique. There is no one like him. He is holy in the sense that he is separate from his creation. He is above his creation. He is holy in the sense that he is absolutely morally pure and righteous and without sin.

So these things have consequences. These things make us, in a sense, there is a sense in which you almost shrink back a little bit when you're hearing them for the first time. You're saying, "Oh, this is different. This is holy. This is separate. Something different is going on here." There are churches today that just go out of their way to try to make the church as comfortable as possible for any unsaved person that enters in. That's a bad idea. That's not good. When people enter into a meeting of the people of God where God's word is being taught, there should be a sense that something different from my life is going on. Not that this is just like everything else that I see wherever I go. There should be a sense of sanctity, a sense of something separate, something different. There is a seriousness about what's happening here and you see that laid out for you in the book of Leviticus. God says, "You're going to have to be different now because you're my people." So the holiness of the Lord comes shining through in the book of Leviticus.

Now, that leads us to a question: how can unworthy people approach God? Isn't that like the most fundamental question in the universe? Is there any question that is more essential for humanity to be able to answer? Is there any more important question in your life than to know how it is that you can approach God when you are unworthy of his presence? Well, Leviticus is designed to help the nation of Israel in that historical context; it's designed to bridge that gap. God has pulled them out as a nation. God is in their midst. How is it that this separate God and these unworthy people, how can they ever, what's going to be the common point at which they meet? What's the common ground of approaching him? The fact that he has made his presence known as we saw at the end of Exodus, he has made his presence known, he intends apparently for his people to approach him but they are sinful, they are unworthy of his presence just like you and I are unworthy of his presence because of our sin.

How is it that that great gulf of separation is made? Leviticus brings us to point 3: the need for sacrifice. The need for sacrifice, and now we're kind of turning the corner and we're pressing the accelerator. This gets really cool. This is just so magnificent and it just takes some very elementary powers of observation to see the significant themes that are being established here in the book of Leviticus about this. The need for sacrifice. We saw the context of Leviticus, the holiness of the Lord, now we're seeing the need for sacrifice.

You know, at a real basic level, I just want this one thought to settle onto your mind right now and it's this: it's that God's holiness has consequences. God's holiness has consequences. You know, there's a song, I should bring this up later in the message but I'm going to bring it up now because it's on my mind right now. There is a song that I remember singing in days gone by at church camps or whatever and places like that. There's a song that says, "Come just as you are to worship. Come just as you are to do whatever." You know, and it's kind of a catchy bouncy tune and that sounds pretty good and it sounds so inviting. You know, when you really think about it though, to say that to an unrepentant sinner is not at all correct. You can't tell an unrepentant sinner, "Come in your hardened love for sin to worship a holy God." God's holiness has consequences and before we can invite people to come, they need to know that they are separate; that God's holiness separates him from them so that they don't have such a casual thought process that they can be living with their significant other or whatever and just come and worship

God and expect him to accept him in the midst of their sin. It does not work that way. God's holiness has consequences and what Leviticus teaches us is that sin prevents men from coming immediately into his presence. We can't just come as we are on our own, in our own position in life, and come straight into the presence of God on our own. Leviticus shows that that is not possible because sin separates men from the presence of God and Israel was sinful. God had redeemed them, brought them out of Egypt, he is present in their midst, but they are a sinful people. This doesn't fit.

How is this tension resolved? Here's the answer that Leviticus provides: God established a sacrificial system through which the barrier of sin could be removed and the saint could abide with him. The bridge between sinful people and a holy God involves sacrifice. There has to be a cost paid for you to enter into the presence of God. That's what Leviticus teaches and we're going to see a few different elements of the need for this sacrifice, and as we unfold what's said in Leviticus, your mind is going to start going toward Jesus Christ automatically. God initiated a sacrifice system. Stated differently: God would be satisfied with the proper atoning sacrifice so that he would receive their worship. In other words, God set the terms. The people couldn't bridge that gap on their own; they couldn't make up their own religion; they couldn't bring their own works and satisfy God. God said in Leviticus, "Here are the terms by which you can approach me." Atonement answers the question: how do we deal with sin in the midst of the presence of a holy God? What does the sacrifice require?

Now, this is really going to take off. Turn back to Leviticus 1. This is so cool. What does the sacrifice require? Well, first of all, the need for sacrifice, first of all, it requires unblemished substitution. It requires unblemished substitution. Israel needed something outside of themselves in order to deal with sin. For you and I here tonight, we need something outside of ourselves to remove the barrier of sin because we can't do it on our own. We don't have that capacity. God doesn't accept what comes from within us to bridge the gulf of sin. Israel needed something outside of themselves. It requires unblemished substitution and you see it right from the start.

Leviticus 1:2, unblemished substitution. "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the LORD.'" So here they are, God is saying, "When you are coming to approach me in all of my holiness, in all of my grandeur, here is what I require. You can't make up your own rules, this is what I require in order for a man to approach me." He says there in verse 2, "You shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock." Verse 3, "If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd," watch this, "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." Verse 4, "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."

Now, we're not used to seeing actual animal sacrifices here today in 2014 but step back in time, as it were, an Israelite wants to approach the presence of God, the Scripture says he has to bring an animal that has no defect; it has to be unblemished; it has to be an outwardly conforming perfectly shaped animal in order to serve as the offering. And

when it talks about the laying on of hands, look at it there in verse 4, "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering," that is a symbolic act saying that, "What I have done with my hands, I transfer to the head of this animal," and in that symbolic act, God establishes the principle that there must be a substitute. So what I have done, what has come through my life, what my hands have done, I confer it upon this animal that is about to be slain. There is a principle of substitution that's involved and so what you see is, as we stop and we just think about what's going on here, in between the man who wants to worship and God, in between is this sacrifice, this animal who is going to bridge the gap, as it were. I put my hands on and say, "Here's my guilt." The substitute is there. And Leviticus does this in multiple places.

Look over chapter 3. I just want you to see that we're not picking one isolated verse; that this is a repeated theme. An unblemished substitute, we're going to take this step by step. Chapter 3, verse 1, "Now if his offering is a sacrifice of peace offerings, if he is going to offer out of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without defect before the LORD." Unblemished. Verse 2, "He shall lay his hand on the head of his offering." And so an unblemished substitute, lay your hands upon it. Show that there is a transfer going on; that you are now being represented in the presence of this substitute. This substitute is representing you in an unblemished way.

Chapter 4, verse 3, and we're not going to take the time to try to explain all the different offerings that are in Leviticus. That's just not our purpose tonight. Leviticus 4:3. We want to see these bigger themes. "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. 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." Transfer. Between me and God is this animal that is bridging the gap.

Leviticus 8:14. We're going to come back to all of these passages almost but I want you to see it a step at a time. Leviticus 8:14, when Aaron was being consecrated as the high priest, "he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering."

So let's step back for just a second. Apparently, if you want to approach God for the sake of worship, you must have an unblemished substitute to stand between you and God in order for that to happen. Unblemished substitute. The animal is, so to speak, perfect and you put your guilt on that animal. You lay your hands, representative of what you've done, your hands represent what you've done, you put them on that animal and he substitutes in your place.

Now, secondly, this need for sacrifice, it's an unblemished substitution, it also requires bloodshed. It requires bloodshed. It wasn't enough to simply bring your animal and then give it to the priest and the priest would take it and let it be part of his herd. That's not the point at all. This wasn't a contribution to the flock that would continue to live now belonging to the priest instead of you. That is not the way it worked at all.

Now, here's where it becomes important to remember that Leviticus is part of the whole Pentateuch. From the very beginning when Adam sinned in Genesis 3, in fact, in Genesis 2, let's turn back there. I wasn't going to go into this but let's just go back there for just a moment because it's just too important to ignore. Genesis 2:16, "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'" So even in paradise, even in the garden of Eden, there is this threat, there is this promise of a judgment of death for disobedience. And as you know, Adam sinned in chapter 3, and when you look at chapter 3, verse 21, you know that Adam didn't immediately die; something different happened than what you might have thought. Adam sinned but somehow he didn't immediately physically die. Well, it's because there was a substitute, a bloodshed substitute, Genesis 3:21, "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." And the skin of that sacrifice stood between the person and God. They were now covered with something that they didn't have before; something from outside them, something that God provided that covered them in their sin that allowed them to continue to live, but notice, blood was shed in order for that to happen.

Now, with that in mind, realizing that a pattern was set right from the very beginning of the Pentateuch of which Leviticus is an integral part, now go back to Leviticus 1:5. This is so cool. Leviticus 1:5. We have the substitute. We've transferred guilt, as it were, to the substitute, now what happens? You know. Verse 5, "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. He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces." There had to be, as it were, a knife that was plunged into that animal and the blood would spurt out. There had to be a bloody sacrifice; a bloody substitution made. In keeping with the demands of the holiness of God, there had to be bloodshed when an Israelite wanted to approach him, and this was reinforced in some of those other passages that we looked at. The animal died. The animal spilled its blood. Leviticus 3:2, "He shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and slay it at the doorway of the tent of meeting." Slay it. Chapter 4, verse 4, "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," it, slay "the bull before the LORD."

Now, just as an aside, there were some sacrifices prescribed in the book of Leviticus that were not specifically for sin and did not require bloodshed, but that doesn't change the principle that we're seeing being established and inculcated in the nation. If you want to approach God knowing that you are separated from him, it requires an unblemished substitute for atonement slain instead of you. You need to get your guilt onto something else that will die on your behalf. That's the only way you can approach God. You can't come just as you are. There needs to be a substitute to help bridge that gap.

Now, as we just continue to take this element by element here, we said that there is this need for sacrifice and it requires unblemished substitution; it requires bloodshed. Thirdly, about this need for sacrifice, it requires mediation. The other aspect of this atoning sacrifice was that you needed a priest to offer it for you. You could not do the whole

thing by yourself. There had to be a priest who was standing between God and man who took this unblemished sacrifice and somehow offered it to God on your behalf. You could not make the offering directly. God appointed a line of priests who alone were able to do that.

Look at Leviticus 1:7, actually just go to verse 5, and notice that this is in the very first paragraph of Leviticus. Leviticus is setting forth how this nation was going to abide with a holy God in their midst; how this new nation that had just been formed could survive without being incinerated by the presence of a holy God, and in the very first paragraph all of these principles are being laid out. It's very powerful to realize. So in verse 5, you see that, "He shall slay the young bull before the LORD," and here come men into the picture, appointed men, "Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar." Verse 7, "The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire." Verse 8, "Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces." And in verse 9, "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." Priests were set apart who alone could fulfill that task.

Look at chapter 3, verse 2, "He shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and slay it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood around on the altar." Chapter 6, actually chapter 4, verse 5. I want you to see how consistent it is in the passages that we've looked at. Leviticus 4:5, "The anointed priest is to take some of the blood of the bull and bring it to the tent of meeting, and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood." It's not the worshiper now. It's the priest who has taken over and is now offering the blood in the presence of God. So there is this go-between between the sinful worshiper, his sacrifice, the priest takes the sacrifice and presents it to the Lord in order for it to be acceptable. It wasn't just anyone who could offer this blood. It had to be the appointed priest. Leviticus 6:6, "Then he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt."

It's a pretty graphic picture, isn't it? It's a pretty repetitive picture, isn't it? It's all right there and again and again and again with these different offerings, you're seeing you can't approach God on your own. You need an unblemished sacrifice and it has to die and blood has to be spilled and then someone else has to come and offer that blood to God for you. You can't do it on your own. God will be appeased, God will accept the sacrifice, but you have to do it his way and there needs to be something, someone to intervene between you and God if you're going to approach him and your worship is going to be acceptable. God is holy, men are not. They needed a priest to offer a slain, unblemished sacrifice for atonement if they were to approach God. That's the end of point 3.

Now, this next part is really important. It's all really important, I mean, this is just important foundational stuff but when you read the book of Exodus, if you're at all like me when you've tried to read the book of Exodus, you're just mindful that there are just so many rules. One rule after another, and this sacrifice has to be done this way, and that

sacrifice that way, and it all seems kind of ritualistic, legalistic, external, and when it has that effect on you as you read it today, sometimes it might seem kind of distant and cold and just mechanical. Well, what I want you to see from the very words of Leviticus, if you've thought about the book of Leviticus this way, if you've thought about the Old Testament sacrificial system this way, I want you to see that God didn't design it to be that way at all. God would not accept worship like that if it was just a matter of going through the motions. It's not acceptable to just simply do the prescribed external acts and think that that was acceptable to God. If you're casually, superficially, imperfectly reading Leviticus, you might think that, but that's simply a product of us not paying enough attention to the book, not because of what it says on its own terms. Leviticus, which is presenting the heart of how these people were going to approach God, was not, I repeat, was not, I'll say it again, was not a lifeless system of external works. It was not. First of all, Leviticus presupposes that the Israelite approached God with the same repented trusting faith that Abraham had exhibited in Genesis. It's all part of the same one book of Moses. It's all connected. There is a context to this. Leviticus doesn't stand alone, it's in the flow of redemptive history. And even in the terms of Leviticus when you read it carefully, you see right there are the same kind of elements that we associate with being a Christian in the New Testament. This is so vital and important for you to see and understand.

First of all, Leviticus calls upon the Israelites to confess their sins. Look at Leviticus 5:5, "It shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned." There is a broken hearted open confession, "I have sinned." Leviticus 16:21, "Aaron," the high priest, "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." Look, that can only happen when there's been a self-examination going on; when there is an acknowledgment of guilt and an acknowledgment, a confession that says, "I am not worthy. I have transgressed the law of God. I'm guilty of sin." They are not simply the way God designed it, the way God designed it, it was not simply an external matter. There was heart engagement with what was to take place.

Turn over to Leviticus 19. All of these different strands come together to make an overarching point. Leviticus 19:17, God addresses the inner man as he speaks to his people. He says, "You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him." Verse 18, "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." There is this heart involvement that God calls the people to in the book of Leviticus. You don't approach with jealousy. You don't carry these grudges. And not only is it not these negative things that you avoid, there is this positive manifestation of loving your neighbor that is required if you would be in my presence. So what I want you to see is there is this internal dynamic in addition to the external prescriptions for how the sacrifices were to be offered, and in all of it, they were to humble their souls.

Look at Leviticus 23:27, speaking about the day of atonement. Actually, Leviticus 23, go to verse 26. I guess 26 and 27 are right there together. My eyes are playing tricks on me.

Verse 26 is very short. "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying," now verse 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." Verse 32, "It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath." Now, that was very quick but what I want you to see is in the terms of Leviticus, confession of sin, love your neighbor, humble your souls. We need to see that and let that sink in a bit so that we think rightly about this sacrificial system. It was not mechanical. It was not purely external. God designed this for them to express a truly repentant heart and if you're not persuaded by that, other Old Testament passages confirmed that understanding.

Turn to Psalm 51. What you need to see because it's so easy to misinterpret the Old Testament and think that it was all about external things and now the New Testament is about the heart. Not true. There is continuity between what God required from his people in the Old and in the New Testaments. Psalm 51:16. I said to you earlier God required the sacrifice to be brought with a repentant heart or it was unacceptable. Now you see David in Psalm 51 affirming that principle as he talks about the Levitical sacrificial system in the midst of his great confession of sin after he sinned with Bathsheba. Verse 16, "You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God," what God requires, "are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." So David says, "It's not just about going through the mechanical sacrifice, God, I understand that you want a broken, contrite spirit that is sorry for sin and comes to you with repentance."

Verse 18. Does that mean that the sacrifice was irrelevant? No. Verse 18, "By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar." The sacrifice was appropriate and pleasing to God when it was offered with a broken contrite spirit. Doesn't this sound just like what the New Testament requires today? If you want to jot down notes, for the sake of time we're not going to turn to these passages on this point: Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8 make the same point and reinforce it. The sacrifices were to be brought with a repentant believing heart. So here we are, holy God, how do people approach him? It requires a sacrifice. An unblemished substitutionary sacrifice. Bloodshed offered through a priest. That's what Leviticus requires.

Now, we're going to accelerate into the New Testament and pull all of this together and point 5 here: the fulfillment of Leviticus. The fulfillment of Leviticus. Stay with me, if you would, just a few more minutes. As important as those sacrifices were at the time, Scripture teaches us that they did not actually accomplish redemption in and of themselves. For the rest of our time, we're going to be looking at the book of Hebrews. Turn to Hebrews 10 as the Bible gives a commentary on its own text in the progress of God's revelation. Hebrews 10. Oh, what's in Hebrews is just such a great commentary on Leviticus. It shows us, now we start to understand the work of Christ on our behalf in a whole different way.

Hebrews 10:1, "The Law, was only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, it can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?" There would be a permanent ongoing effect if those sacrifices in Leviticus did the job permanently, but they don't. Verse 3, "in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." There is a symbolism to the transfer of guilt as shown by the laying on of hands but you can't substitute animal blood for human sin. That's the problem with the system.

So what God was using, the system to accomplish over the ensuing 1,400 years up until the time of Christ, God was impressing upon the national consciousness the need for an unblemished sacrifice for atonement. The repetition year after year, generation after generation, was designed to impress upon people that as sinners we need an atoning sacrifice if we're going to approach God. And because of the pride of man, the thickness of man's skull and the hardness of the human heart, you can't just say it one time and everybody get it. Repetition is the key to learning. Over and over and over and over again: bloodshed, bloodshed, bloodshed, my hands on the animal, substitution for me. And all of that was a foreshadowing of Christ who would come later and this is where it gets really good and sweet for us now. Jesus Christ said you need a priest; you need a mediator; you need a sacrifice; it's got to be bloody; it's got to be unblemished; it's got to be a substitution. Well, Hebrews says, "Take all of those principles that were inculcated over the prior 1,500 years and realize that all of them, all of those rivers converge into the person of Christ in utter perfection and now we see how it is that Christ fulfills these sacrifices."

First of all, turn to Hebrews 2. We're going to finish up here too quickly but that's the way it goes. Christ came to earth in order to be the great high priest for his people. Here he is. Christ came to be the mediator that we needed. Chapter 2, verse 14, Hebrews makes these things so abundantly clear. "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself," referring to Christ, "likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." Verse 17, "He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Our mediator, the one who bridges the gap between holy God and us is found in Christ Jesus alone. What Israel had been taught to anticipate through a succession of human priests now finds its final and complete fulfillment, the mediator between man and God is Christ and Christ alone.

What else can we say about this Christ? In light of the principles that God established in his word earlier, an unblemished sacrifice offered as a substitute for sinners, Hebrews 7:26, "It was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens." Christ was without sin. He was unblemished. He was perfect. He was qualified to be the sacrifice. It required an

unblemished sacrifice in the Old Testament, it required an unblemished sacrifice in the New, and Christ alone was that unblemished one. And in a magnificent combination of God's eternal principles of righteousness, Christ himself was the bloody sacrifice on our behalf. Look at verse 27 of Hebrews 7, "He does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."

Beloved, when you think about the weight of the fear of God and the holiness that we were talking about earlier in the message, this should be really, really sweet to you. This should really exalt the person of Christ in your mind, in your thinking, in your eyes, and in your affections, that Christ made atonement, watch this, watch this, watch this, Christ was both the priest and the sacrifice. He offered up as a priest himself as the sacrifice.

Look at Hebrews 10:11. He offered himself. Verse 11, Hebrews 10, "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time," that's the end of the Roman Catholic Mass forever and shows how empty and false that is. "One sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God," he could sit down because the work was finished, "waiting from that time onward until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."

What Leviticus taught men to expect and what God said, "This is my requirement, a bloody sacrifice, unblemished, offered on your behalf by a priest," Christ did it all and he did it himself. As the great priest, he said, "Here I am as the sacrifice." And they thrust the sword in his side when he had expired; the nails were thrust in his hands; the blood spurt out so that the death that was required for you to be reconciled to God could be fulfilled. Leviticus teaches us to anticipate Christ and when we see and understand his work, we're overwhelmed with joy, and now we approach God through Christ with that same repentant believing heart that trusts him as the atoning sacrifice for sin.

Verse 19, and this is where we'll have to wrap it up, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God," all the requirements are fulfilled right there. He did it for us. He did it as a priest. He did it with his blood. Now, verse 22, "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." That which separated us has been dealt with in the person of Christ. The priest has made the sacrifice, now there is access to God. But what I want you to see is that it's external to you. A priest offered himself in his blood outside of you. You must rely on that which is outside of yourself if you are to be reconciled to God.

So we come to God with a humble heart through our high priest Jesus Christ who was himself the perfect unblemished sacrifice whose shed blood was offered on our behalf and, get this, accepted by God. That's why he raised him from the dead. So in Leviticus, the groundwork for us to understand Christ has been laid and now we rely not on the

blood of an animal but the blood of a man, a perfect man, incarnate God, shed on our behalf. How do we approach God? It takes a priest, it takes someone to mediate, it takes a bloody sacrifice, it takes a substitute, and we come to Christ, as it were, and we lay the guilt of our guilty hands on him and say, "I transfer my guilt to you. Take my guilt away based on the sacrifice that you offered to your Father." Do you know that transfer? Have you turned your sin over to Christ like that? If you have, rest and be at peace. God is pleased. God accepts that one sacrifice, only that one, but completely that one. And now reconciled through the blood, we can approach him to worship, to pray, to honor him, with a full sense of conviction of a clean conscience that there is no longer a barrier between us and God, and all God's people can do is say, "Lord Jesus, thank you so much."

Let's pray.

*Father, we are grateful for your word. We know that we cannot please you with good works of our own. We thank you for the great high priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, who intervened on our behalf and brought his own blood, as it were, into your very presence, the perfect sacrifice, the blood of a man for the sins of men, the value of God applied to that sacrifice because he was God incarnate. Father, we see how you must be approached. We need a substitute. We need a priest. There needs to be bloodshed. And you have provided it all outside of ourselves in the person of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, if anyone is here still separate from Christ, lead them through the blood into your presence. Bring their hearts to faith in Christ that they might be reconciled to you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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