

Devotional Meditations on the Book of Leviticus

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Anyone who has been reading my other meditations may notice some differences in my approach to this work on Leviticus. Having recently completed a sermon series on Leviticus I decided to use them as a starting point for what is contained here. Using the wonders of technology I was able to make digital transcripts of my sermons and also correct and smooth out the content in a way that is more suitable for written prose. I then “manually” edited much of the document, breaking up the sermons into smaller chunks or condensing them into smaller pieces more suitable for a meditation. The end product is thus the result of a combination of machine and human editing.

Some sections received more of this manual (i.e. human) editing and some less. Thus, the work has a less consistent and somewhat “uneven” feeling to the overall style and “voice.” In time I would like to rework and rewrite the entire document. At the same time there are those who have inquired about the meditations on Leviticus since their absence on the church website has left a hole for those working through the Bible. I thus offer this “work-in-progress” as a placeholder until a more well-edited version can be completed.

Introduction - Devotional Meditation on the Book of Leviticus

Why read the book of Leviticus? Its content seems so foreign to most readers. Here we read of priests, offerings, and sacrifices. We have long lists of clean and unclean foods. All this is outlined in copious (and sometimes tedious) detail. In the coming of Christ, both sacrifice and offering have passed away. The other types and shadows of the OT have come to fulfillment. He has declared all foods clean. Did not Christ come to free us from the yoke of the ceremonial law? Did he not also come to free us from the yoke of studying it? Why take our time to read the book of Leviticus?

Leviticus reveals to us our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of both the priesthood and the sacrifices. He is the final offerer and the final offering. The details of the types reveal some of the specifics of his work for us. In short, Leviticus has much to teach us about Jesus!

This book begins with a focus on sacrifice and offering. But these aspects of worship did not begin with Moses. Right after the fall, God himself provided sacrificial coverings for Adam and Eve to replace the feeble fig leaves they constructed to hide their guilt and shame (Gen. 3). After the fall, both Cain and Abel approach God in worship through sacrifice. Likewise, the Patriarch Job offers atoning sacrifices for his children in case they had sinned against the Lord. Sacrifice and offering thus predated Moses, even as the promise of the redeemer preceded the era of the Law. That is because these things are essential for every sinner who wishes to approach a holy God.

Secondly, another reason we should study this book is that everything revealed here is really a copy and shadow of heavenly things. Exodus 25:40 states this directly, and the point is reiterated in the book of Hebrews (8:5). The tabernacle is a copy and reflection of heaven. The entire ceremonial law also points them to the heavenly realities above. In fact, these things point forward in history to Christ because they first pointed upward to heaven. The earthly sanctuary cannot be approached without blood because we cannot enter the heavenly sanctuary without a bleeding sacrifice. Leviticus thus teaches us not only about Christ but about heaven!

Thirdly, Leviticus helps us clearly see the fulness of our redemptive blessings in Christ. He comes to free us from both the guilt and power of sin. He comes not only to justify but to sanctify. This book reminds us that not all sacrifices are the same. The first chapters outline four distinct kinds of offerings, all of which have a different significance. We will get into the details later. Sacrifice can be reduced to two key

elements: expiation and consecration. Expiation has to do with the removal of the guilt of sin. As long as we are in the flesh, the presence of sin can never be fully removed from us. That doesn't occur until the soul is translated into heaven at death, and the body is raised up in glory. But in this life, we do have the guilt of sin completely removed from us. This occurs through the bloody sacrifices. The animal is offered as a substitute in the place of the offerer. The guilt of the sinner is richly transferred to the beast which absorbs sin's punishment in its death.

The other element in sacrifices is consecration. This has to do with the separation of the sinner from all that is unclean. He is consecrated and set apart for a holy purpose. In this, his entire life is devoted to the holy service of God.

Theologically speaking expiation and consecration corresponds to the twin benefits of justification and sanctification. In justification, our sins are forgiven and removed from us. This flows out of expiation. In sanctification, we are made holy or "set apart" to the Lord so that we might live in holiness before him. This flows out of our consecration to God.

Indeed, our whole redemption depends on getting this distinction correct. We learn about it most clearly in the book of Leviticus. We cannot approach God without first coming through a substitute. None of our obedience will have any meaning or value to God unless it is first covered by the blood of a sacrifice. Although our justification and sanctification both come simultaneously through faith and union with Christ, our sanctification cannot be accepted by God unless we first are justified. To make sanctification dependent upon justification is to turn faith into works and grace into merit, thus destroying the foundation of our salvation.

Indeed, in the first four chapters, we have the order of the Christian life laid out before us in the types and shadows of the four sacrifices. We must start with a blood offering. We need a substitute to take our punishment before we can approach God. After that, we must endeavor with full purpose to live a life of consecration to the Lord.

In short, Leviticus has much to teach the Christian. It shows us that we need a mediator to serve on our behalf, whom we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. It shows us that we have a home in heaven above that Christ is preparing for every believer. It shows the way of our salvation, coming first in the expiation of our sins in the blood of Christ and in the consecration of our lives in thankful obedience to him. Leviticus gives us the Gospel in visible form, fulfilled in Jesus, and at work in our hearts and lives. Let us then read it eagerly, asking God for wisdom and insight to enlighten our dim eyes with the realities of the kingdom of God.

#1 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 1

Yesterday, we provided an introduction to Leviticus for modern readers. Today, we will focus on the specifics of the burnt offering in chapter 1.

The first thing to note about this sacrifice is its costliness. This is indicated by the two options for sacrificial provisions: a beast or a bird. Inflation has hit food prices pretty hard. Many are opting to buy more chicken and pass on beef due to increased costs. Leviticus 1 requires that Israelites ordinarily offer from the herd or the flock. But it also allows poorer Israelites to offer a bird. The sacrifice was proportionally costly to the income of the offerer, emphasizing the value required to atone for sin. While the impoverished were permitted to offer a less expensive bird, the sacrifice still needed to be valuable. Ultimately, only the blood of God could pay the debt of eternal punishment and purchase the priceless gift of eternal life. The precious blood of the Son of God who was foreknown before the foundation of the world is the only sufficient payment for sin.

Israel is later chastised by the Lord through the prophet Malachi when they offer the diseased or injured animals. They gave their worst to the Lord when they should have given their best. But we also see God's mercy to the poor in allowing a less expensive creature to be presented before God in worship.

Secondly, the sacrifice also had a vicarious character, serving as a substitute for the offerer. This is symbolized by the offerer placing their hand upon the sacrifice, transferring the guilt of their sins to the animal substitute. The one great sacrifice on the day of atonement further emphasizes this concept.

Third, we cannot help but note the graphic and memorable way these theological lessons were taught. The process of sacrifice would have been a shocking and dramatic moment for the offerer and their family, publicly acknowledging their sin and the fact that they are worthy of death. When the offerer placed his hand on the animal, he was publicly acknowledging that he was a sinner. In killing the animal, he was openly declaring that he was worthy of a violent, bloody death. He himself had to take up a knife and slaughter the animal before everyone. The whole scene would've been both bloody and shocking.

Today, when we come to church, we are usually greeted by a warm smile and a handshake. The scene is typically one of life and joy. Not so in the old covenant. The first thing required to come near to God was participation in bloody death. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

It is foolish to view burnt offerings as meritorious acts that can earn God's favor. Instead, they served as a visible display of the Israelites' unworthiness and need for atonement. Christ's atonement serves as the fulfillment of these sacrifices, as He is the sacrificial lamb without blemish or spot who ransomed us with His precious blood.

Fourth, we can also note that the lamb's age at the time of sacrifice represents Christ's full obedience to the law. It was to be a year old. This meant that it had to undergo a process of growth and development until it reached a level of physical maturity. So also Christ did not come into the world fully formed, but grew from a baby, to an infant, to a boy, and finally to a grown man. This growth involved his both actively and passively fulfilling the law. He became a lamb without spot or blemish. Together, this points to Christ's full obedience in which he fulfilled the law's requirements and removed its punishment.

Incidentally, we see then how foolish the Israelites and the scribes and Pharisees were to turn these burnt offerings into meritorious acts that could somehow earn God's favor. Embedded deep within them

was the visible display of the offerer's utter unworthiness. Not their merits, but their demerits were on dramatic display. Such is the blindness of sin to turn an act that reveals our unrighteousness into an attempt to establish our own righteousness.

“Theories” of Christ’s atonement that rejected its substitutionary or vicarious character. All such foolish theories die a quick death when we consider the type and shadow of Christ’s death in the burnt offering. The type informs the anti-type.

The book begins with a substitutionary, vicarious, bloody sacrifice. It does so for good reason. Our Christian lives must also begin with this sacrifice as it is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. He is our substitutionary lamb, a male without blemish or spot. In him, the righteous was given for the unrighteous that he might bring us near to God. It is only in him that any good work or service can be acceptable to God by the powerful grace of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we begin our Christian lives at the foot of Christ's cross. This is the only way to enter the kingdom of God and dwell in the Lord's heavenly presence.

#2 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 2

The Book of Leviticus contains many details which may seem at first seem confusing. However, there are patterns and important points that stand out. The first several chapters of Leviticus contain an exposition of the various offerings that Israel was to present to the Lord. Spiritually speaking, they represent the entire process of salvation in the Christian life, beginning with the need for atonement for sin through a burnt offering (chapter 1). This is followed by a life of devotion and service to God, reflected in the grain offerings (chapter 2). The peace offering reflects the fact that we have peace and fellowship with God (chapter 3), and the sin offering addresses what to do when we sin after becoming Christians due to the remnants of corruption in us (chapter 4). These chapters illustrate the entire process of salvation and the Christian life, which moves from atonement to consecration to fellowship to a life dwelling together in peace with God. If one only sees confusing details in Leviticus, they are missing the bigger point.

As we discussed previously, all sacrifices in the OT are either centered on the principle of expiation or consecration. Every sacrifice involves an element of consecration, but not all of them involve expiation. Chapter 2 of Leviticus explores offerings that reflect devotion, service, and commitment to the Lord in all aspects of life, as demonstrated in the grain offering.

Let us clearly recognize the sacramental character of these offerings as they reflect the principle of consecration. In the NT era, the Church has been given two sacraments - baptism and the Lord's Supper. A sacrament is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, of Christ, and all the benefits of faith. It visibly portrays what Christ has done for us and what he is doing in us. It also confirms that the one who partakes of it in true faith is a true Christian. The Lord's Supper signifies the work of Christ as an atonement for our sins, but it also includes an element of our own consecration to the Lord. Baptism pictures the washing away of sins through the Holy Spirit and reflects the blood of Christ, but it also signifies that God owns us and calls us to live a pure Christian life.

The sacraments therefore also represent two principles: atonement and consecration. In the OT, there were many sacrifices that embodied these principles, but they all pointed to the same thing. In Leviticus 2, the grain offerings uniquely embody the principle of living before God in devoted consecration and service to him.

But what exactly is "consecration?" When something is consecrated, it is set apart for a holy purpose. As Christians, we are consecrated or set apart for the service of God. In Ephesians 5:1-2 Paul says: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Jesus died for us in an atoning sacrifice that brought us expiation. But this pattern of sacrifice also becomes an example of our life of consecrated service to God.

How do the details of this chapter reveal these things? First, note how the grain offering is described as a "pleasing aroma" to the Lord (Lev. 2:2). These offerings were to be seasoned with salt which enhances the taste (2:13). This symbolizes the fact that this sacrifice is pleasing to the Lord. Just as we are pleased with good-tasting and good-smelling food, so God is pleased with our lives of sacrificial consecration. Apart from God's grace, our obedience stinks. Rather than the sweetness of frankincense, our life of holiness frankly reeks! Yet by God's grace in Christ, he makes it acceptable because it is preceded by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

This principle is particularly applied to the prayers of the saints, which were symbolized in the altar of incense (as we discussed earlier in our devotionals on Exodus). In Acts 10:4 we read that Cornelius's prayers ascended as a "memorial" before God. Notice the connection to Leviticus 2:16, which speaks of the memorial portion of the grain offering. Our devotion to God is best measured by the sincerity, earnestness, and intensity of our prayers. Redemption is ultimately to lead our hearts to God. He draws near to us by his word, and we draw near to him in prayer.

Secondly, notice also that this life of consecration involves the support of the ministry of the Gospel in the church. This can be seen in verse 10, where a portion of food offerings is given to God and burned on the altar, while the rest is given to Aaron and his sons. In this way, the priests were able to feed themselves and carry out their duties in the temple. This principle of consecration and devotion to God is exemplified by the tribe of Levi, who did not have any land in Israel but were instead devoted to the service of God in the temple.

Similarly, in the New Testament, those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from it, as it is essential to support the work of spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This support goes beyond ensuring the comfort of the minister and their family, as it ultimately demonstrates our dedication to the goal of spreading the Gospel and reminds us that our lives are devoted to the Lord.

Thirdly, we also see how the details of the grain offering indicates that our entire lives are consecrated to God. In other words, this consecration is comprehensive. The grain offering is not offered in a "raw" form. Instead, flour is to be made, pressed, shaped, cooked, and seasoned into something edible and flavorful. Behind the cooking process is also the entire process of farming by which the grain was produced. There is a long and arduous process involved in bringing this offering from its initial form as a seed to a growing plant, and finally to a finished product.

This symbolizes the fact that our consecration to God is a long process that envelops our entire lives. This not only applies to us personally and individually but is the same imagery Christ uses to describe the entire life and work of the church until the end of the age. At that time the great harvest will come in which Christ gathers the wheat into his barn but burns the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Having been cleansed from the guilt of our sins by the blood of Christ we are to live lives of consecrated service to him. Our justification is followed by our sanctification. In love, we give ourselves to the service of Christ, for he loved us and gave himself for us.

#3 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 3

The Book of Exodus is filled with amazing things that God did for Israel during the era of Moses. From the ten plagues, including turning the river Nile into blood and blackening out the sun in the sky, to the Angel of Death killing all the firstborn of Egypt, Israel's escape from Egypt, and the parting of the Red Sea, there are many impressive events. However, there is one event that stands out as the most amazing. In Exodus 24, we read about the confirmation of the covenant between God and Israel. The people made a covenant and confirmed it with burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. They ratified the covenant by committing themselves in faith and loyalty to God. All that the Lord had spoken they would do.

Then, in verse 9, we read of something truly amazing. Moses and Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. There was a pavement of sapphire stone under his

feet, and he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They beheld God himself and ate and drank with him.

This event is beautiful because it shows the resultant state that comes from God's mighty acts, including the sacrifices and offerings. He redeemed them that they might come into God's very presence and enjoy fellowship with Him. The peace offering in Leviticus 3 shows us the state of peace, fellowship, and communion that results from their atonement and consecration. Our union with Christ leads to a state of communion with God. The burnt offering puts away our sins and forgives us, and the grain offering signifies and points us to the consecration of our entire life and all that we have to the service of God and to His glory. But expiation and consecration and means to a greater end: fellowship and communion with him. In our Christian life, it is easy to forget about this key aspect of our walk before God. The peace offering is a wonderful reminder of this distinctive aspect of our redemption. It is introduced here in Leviticus 3, but we also read more details about it in chapter 7.

There are four things we can note about it.

The first thing is its name. The offering is called the "peace offering" (or "shalom" in Hebrew) which is related to the idea of thanksgiving. While the term "peace" typically refers to a lack of conflict, the Hebrew word "Shalom" connotes something more. It embodies a comprehensive state of well-being and gratitude flowing from an individual's connection to God. Unlike other offerings, which were tied to specific times and places, the peace offering was given voluntarily. In this it was an expression of spontaneous gratitude in response to God's providential blessings. This offering also serves as a reminder of the positive aspects of resolving conflicts and restoring broken relationships, which allow individuals to enjoy a sense of peace and fellowship with one another. Ultimately, the concept of *Shalom* reminds us that our forgiveness and redemption lead to a greater goal. God doesn't simply take away our sins and send us elsewhere on our merry way. The end of redemption is to bring us back into fellowship with God so that we might glorify and enjoy him forever.

Secondly, note how this offering comes to expression in the sharing of a meal. A meal is a significant way to demonstrate peace and reconciliation in the Bible. Table fellowship is the ultimate expression of friendship between God and humans. The hostility between Jews and Gentiles was a big problem in the book of Acts, as seen in Peter's encounter with the Gentiles. He had shared a meal with them, which caused an uproar among the Jews. However, he later understood that the Gentiles were also children of God and could be part of the church. The sharing of a meal was an important expression of spiritual communion and fellowship, which indicated that they were part of the same family. The peace offering is also expressed through a meal that involves everyone participating in the service. Therefore, the peace offering represents fellowship and unity.

Consider those times of year you may gather with your extended family to share a holiday meal such as Christmas or Thanksgiving. The cousins happily gather and play together. You spend time with your parents and siblings which reminds you of the days of your upbringing. While sin can often corrupt these moments in sad ways, it is still often a joyous time of fellowship and peace. Such is the peace we have with God through Christ. We were wayward children, but are now restored to God's family. Like the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son, the Lord rejoices to be in restored communion with us even as we rejoice to be in him.

Thirdly, note that the meal of the peace offering involves everyone in the service. First and foremost, this sacrifice is offered to the Lord. The fat part of the offering is given to God, as it is the best part. The

guest at this meal is God himself, and the offerer makes sure to give him the best. The priest, who acts as an intermediary between the offerer and the Lord, also has a part in the meal. There is also a part of the offering that goes to the priest. Finally, the offerer also gets something to eat. In other words, everyone at the table enjoys the meal together and nobody goes away with an empty stomach. The meal is expressive of fellowship, and it is important to think about the actual details of what a meal would be like to fully appreciate its significance.

This is a reminder that while there is a distinction between the leadership and laity of the church, all members are equal in Christ. There are different gifts and roles, but everyone is a member of the one body of Christ. Likewise, we are all part of the same family. Whatever tribe, tongue, people, or nation there is a single worldwide church of Christ. This church family may exist under different communions and not yet fully manifest its visible unity. But where there is true faith and the pure preaching of the word Christ will also dwell.

Finally, this fellowship offering is an expression of gratitude towards God. While there are many aspects to this peace offering, the element of thanksgiving stands out perhaps the most. This offering was often given on occasions when God blessed a person or people with something extraordinary or special, and they wanted to express their devotion above and beyond the appointed times and means of worship. The offering was an expression of thanks to God for his grace and goodness, and so the best part of the sacrifice was given with delight and joy. The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes the whole Christian life as thankfulness in response to what God has done. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that what God desires of us above all is a thankful heart that delights in him. It is theoretically possible to believe that God forgives and has consecrated one's life to him without being happy about it, but the peace offering reminds us that the ultimate fruit God desires from us is thankfulness. The apostle's letters often begin with a section of thanksgiving, reflecting the language of the peace offering. Christians are also urged to present their bodies as living sacrifices and to offer their good works to God as fragrant and acceptable sacrifices. These offerings express thankfulness to the Lord for the resultant state of peace and fellowship we have with Him.

Let us then pursue this fellowship with God and with one another. Where there is conflict, let us seek reconciliation and peace. Where there is a breach of fellowship, may it be restored. Where we experience this joyous peace between man and God, let us live in thankful devotion to Christ, by whose grace alone we are restored to living fellowship with the Triune God.

#4 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 4:1-5:31

"I didn't mean to do it!" From young children to adult politicians, people often use this phrase as an excuse for their misdeeds. The Bible acknowledges that not all sins are equally heinous in God's sight, and there is a distinction between high-handed sins and unintentional sins. But both are still considered sins. The emphasis in this passage is on the unique character of unintentional sins and the rules for sin offerings that address them.

There are three things to note: (1) their general significance, (2) the different groups who commit them, and (3) God's provision of forgiveness for them.

First, let's consider their general significance. The phrase "sinning unintentionally" appears repeatedly in this section, and it is clearly what links all of these provisions together. This phrase can be difficult to translate. Some people interpret it simply as a "mistake." However, there is a usage of this phrase in the Bible that indicates a lack of intention. For example, Numbers 35 discusses the regulations and laws about cities of refuge. These cities provide a sanctuary for someone who has killed another person unintentionally. We also recognize such a situation today with our laws regarding vehicular manslaughter. In referring to "car accidents" we are recognizing that unintentional death may occur. But there is still a responsibility to be borne by the parties involved. God not only forbids us to directly harm others but also requires us to do what is reasonable to ensure their safety. The failure to do this is a sin, even if the harm inflicted was unintentional.

The unintentional sins referred to in Leviticus seem to be sins of carelessness or ignorance. Although it is a lesser level of sin, forgiveness is still needed. There are several reasons why unintentional sins occur in this sinful world. One reason is that our minds are spiritually blind and dull. For instance, when we think about the Ten Commandments, our automatic way of thinking immediately highlights the outward action. However, there is more to each commandment than what is explicitly stated. For example, misusing God's name is not only about using it as a swear word but also about anything we do in our actions that would bring reproach upon it. Likewise, looking at another person with lustful intent in our hearts is also considered adultery. Because our minds are spiritually blind, we can often deceive ourselves into thinking that we are not committing a sin when we actually are. Later, we may realize our wrongdoing as we reflect on the word of God. We didn't actively and self-consciously intend to sin, but upon reflection, we realize that we did.

The second reason for these provision regarding unintentional sins relates to the detailed nature of the ceremonial law under the OT. This can be seen in the specific instructions provided regarding the actions of priests, such as how to sacrifice animals and which parts to place where. The laws regarding cleanliness also involve a great deal of detail, with many different objects and activities rendering a person unclean. Given the sometimes complex details in these matters, it is not difficult to see how someone may have unintentionally violated them. The Bible teaches that even unintentional sins are still regarded as sin and must be taken seriously. Christians cannot make excuses for their sinfulness, even if they did not intend to sin. The Book of Leviticus provides a detailed account of the various ways in which unintentional sins can occur, making it clear that Christians must take responsibility for their actions.

Secondly, the passage also draws attention to the various groups or people who can commit these sins. There are four categories outlined in the passage: (1) the priest, (2) the people, (3) one of their leaders, and (4) a common person.

The priest is mentioned first in 4:3, where it is stated that if the anointed priest sins, he brings guilt upon the people and must offer a bull from the herd as a sin offering. This placement is significant because the priest is not just an individual sinner, but his sin affects the entire community, as he is a representative and spokesperson of the faith. This concept is rooted in the Old Testament, where the priest was seen as a type and picture of Christ, and his sin was ceremonially imputed to the people. Although this has passed away in Christ, there is still a general principle that when a leader, such as a pastor, sins, it can have a significant impact on the congregation and the ministry of the Gospel. This is because the pastor is visible and represents the Christian faith, so when he sins, it brings reproach upon the church. While the congregation is not directly held guilty of the pastor's sin, the effects of the sin are more pronounced, making the sin of the priest in Leviticus an important reminder of this principle.

Next, the unintentional sins of the whole congregation are addressed. The idea of corporate guilt is very popular nowadays. It is a category that needs to be handled very carefully. While it is certainly possible for one group to sin against another group or a single individual, it is also possible to use this principle to falsely condemn the innocent via "guilt by association." We also need to properly interpret this principle in the context of redemptive history. During this time in history, Israel was a nation and the corporate aspect of the church was emphasized. God has always dealt with his people corporately as a group, but also individually. In the Old Testament, the corporate aspect had more emphasis than the individual, but in the New Testament, the emphasis is more individualized. This is because the church is no longer a political nation, but a spiritual one that is not isolated to one country. The forms of God's blessings and chastisement now come in a more spiritual form. When reading this passage, it's important to note that it is not referring to sins committed by previous generations imputed to later generations, but rather contemporary sins occurring in the present time. The sins could be related to the national life, where corrupt practices become accepted, particularly in ritual life and worship. In such cases, the congregation has an obligation to recognize the sin and seek forgiveness. The leader is mentioned before the common person, as when a leader sins, even unintentionally, it carries greater responsibility and raises the stakes.

Verse 27 finally mentions a common person, emphasizing an individualized principle instead of only a corporate or representative one. The OT highlights the individual sin of each person, even when a common person sins, provision must still be made for that sin. It serves as a reminder that we should not solely blame our leaders for all problems. It is very common in American politics to view the politicians or "elite" as wicked, but the common man as righteous and good. The reality is that both are affected by sin. The same is true in the church. It is easy to blame the leaders for all the problems. While leaders can be wicked and corrupt due to concentrated power, sin affects every group of people. Leviticus emphasizes this fact in every provision for every offering, reminding Israel of their sin and that each person is worthy of death. We cannot wrongly blame the innocent by lumping them with the guilty, but we should also not avoid taking personal responsibility by blaming others within a larger group.

Thirdly, we also see in this passage God's beautiful provision of forgiveness for us. Even unintentional sins have a provision for atonement. Why is this important? Because while these sins might seem minor and insignificant, God wants us to understand that even the smallest sins deserve death and require atonement. Every section of the text emphasizes the need for Christ, who provides the blood of sacrifice, the only means of forgiveness. The blood is poured out, sprinkled, and applied everywhere, reminding us that we are sinful in every part of our lives--even when we don't realize it! It also reminds us that without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sins. Christ's sacrifice becomes a pleasing aroma to the Lord, who is otherwise displeased with our sin.

These chapters remind us that God is both just and gracious. Yes, we will bear the guilt of our sins, but God has given us a way to have our sins forgiven. After atonement is made, we shall be forgiven. The ultimate goal is not just to remind us of our sins and the death we deserve, but to show us that God himself has provided a priest and an offering for our forgiveness. The Book of Leviticus may seem to emphasize God's strictness and justice, but it's also a preview of the forgiving grace that ultimately comes to us through the blood of Jesus Christ, our sacrifice and priest.

Let us then have hearts that are constantly inclined to repentance and faith. Even when we feel our conscience is cleaned, it may be defiled with a hidden stain. God is gracious to us in our ignorance! But let us always pray with the Psalmist to reveal these things to us that we may serve him in sincerity and love:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

-Psalm 139:23-24

#5 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 5:14-6:7

At this point you may feel a bit overwhelmed with the number of sacrificial provisions outlined in Leviticus. The first few chapters were fairly straightforward with burnt offerings, peace offerings, and fellowship offerings. These were presented in an orderly manner, each getting its own respective chapter.

However, as we reach Leviticus 4-6, dealing with the sin and guilt offerings, things become more complicated. Chapters 5-6 appear to be misaligned in our English Bible due to some confusion regarding the guilt offerings listed. If you feel confused, don't feel too bad about. Whoever later divided the chapters of the Bible had trouble once in a while as well. Despite the possible confusion over the chapter division, one clear theme that stands out in all these sections is that of restitution or compensation. Every sacrifice has a unique and specific emphasis, and the guilt offerings distinctive feature is that of restitution. The offering was to be accompanied with a repayment. The whole amount plus an extra 20% was required. Therefore, the central component of these offerings is the idea that sin incurs a debt that must be repaid.

First, let us consider the specific sins that require this kind of restitution. What do these sins have in common? They all relate to money. Even today, when money is handled publicly or between two parties, there are various laws to protect the transactions. For example, buyer protection is offered through credit card or PayPal purchases. Repayment or restitution is a principle that we understand in our daily lives, and it is under the commandment "You shall not steal." The chapter lists several monetary sins, including tithes and offerings, down payments, security deposits, and wages owed to employees. If someone fails to give the full amount of a tithe, it is a sin against the Lord. Likewise, if someone deceives their neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, it is a sin against the Lord. Finding something lost and keeping it for oneself if you have knowledge of who lost it is also a form of theft.

In many instances, the Israelites were required to add a fifth in repayment or restitution for their sin. There is a valid reason for this. The law contained an "eye for eye, tooth for a tooth" principle. At first, it might seem that a simple repayment is all that would be required. But when we think more carefully about it, we can easily see the need to add 20% to the repayment, especially in the case of theft and robbery.

First, the extra 20% can be viewed as a punishment that acts as a deterrent against theft. Those who realize the extra consequences of stealing will thus think twice before committing the crime. If the punishment were only a simple repayment of what was stolen, the thief would really have nothing to lose in stealing. The worst that can happen is that he has to pay it back. If an extra 20% is required, he will truly have to pay for his crime.

Secondly, the stolen money or property holds value beyond its monetary worth, as the victim may have had plans for it, such as buying food or investing it. Money can increase in value over time for many reasons. This is reflected in the need to pay back an extra 20%.

Thirdly, recovering the stolen property takes significant effort and time, and the victim may have to file police reports and engage with insurance and shipping companies. Thus, simply returning the stolen property is not enough, and adding 20% restitution makes it just. Moreover, the added 20% emphasizes the importance of demonstrating a broken heart of true repentance, which goes beyond what justice

requires, and reminds us of our indebtedness to God through sin. Sin incurs a debt. That debt must be repaid.

It is common for some people in Christian history to reject the idea that Christ's sacrifice was a repayment for the debt of sin. The Socinians, who were considered theological liberals during the Reformation, taught that the idea of Christ's sacrifice as atonement for sin is only a metaphor used to demonstrate God's love for humanity. According to this view, the sacrifice is like an expensive gift that shows the recipient how much they are loved, but it is not necessary to repay a debt. You still hear this theory in modern Christian worship songs. How many of you have heard the line: "Like a rose, trampled on the ground, you took the fall and thought of me above all." By itself, this is a Socinian view of the atonement. (As an aside, I have not looked into the songwriter's full views on the atonement. He may have articulated himself better elsewhere).

However, the Bible clearly states that Christ's sacrifice involves the repayment of a debt incurred by sin. The Socinian view of Christ's death hits a brick wall when we look carefully at Leviticus. The type informs the antitype. As creatures, humans owe God everything, and when we sin, we are stealing from God and incurring a debt that we must repay. This debt is infinite because our sin is against the infinite majesty of God. Christ's sacrifice is described in the Bible as a ransom for many, meaning that it involves a real payment for sin. In 1 Peter 1:18, it is stated that we "have been ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." Jesus himself says that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a "ransom" for many. Paul declares to Timothy that Jesus gave himself as a "ransom" for all his people. The idea of "ransom" obviously requires payment. Both Jesus and the Apostles clearly teach this principle.

The inherent value of Christ's blood lies in the fact that he was without blemish, meaning that he was perfect and his sacrifice was valuable for us. His obedience and death purchased something for us. He repaid the debt we owe to God for our sins and purchased for us the priceless treasure of eternal life. In him we have no further debt to pay for our sins except the debt of love to show our thankfulness for him.

Many of the things you do today will be connected to money. You will work hard to make it or deal shrewdly and carefully to save it. Let us remember that the most valuable thing we have is Christ and his precious blood, given as a free gift from God's hand.

#6 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 6:8-7:21

As you read through Leviticus 6-7, you may have noticed that it repeats some things you have read before. This may seem redundant, but there are two reasons for it in this section. First, the focus shifts from the worshipper to the priests and their specific duties and approaches. The sacrifices involve two parties: the priests and the worshippers. It makes sense to discuss the same material from these different angles.

Secondly, these offerings outline the whole process of redemption for the individual sinner. We always need to be reminded of the basic elements and order of this work. It begins with the burnt offering that atones for sins, followed by a life of consecration represented by the grain offering, leading to fellowship and peace with God represented by the peace offering, and ending with forgiveness for individual instances of sin represented by the guilt and sin offerings. The whole course of redemption is reflected in the order of the sacrifices. The New Testament repeats these principles repeatedly, just as Israel needed to hear them over and over again. Just as the sacrifices themselves were repeated as a constant reminder of his work of grace, so the provisions for the sacrifices are repeated.

In this passage, we see three key things about worshiping God and these offerings: (1) God's authority in directing worship, (2) the perpetuity of worship, and (3) the principle of holiness to the Lord.

First, note God's authority in directing our worship of him. This section emphasizes God's authority in worship through its repetition of offerings. By repeating these instructions, God is making it clear that He alone will decide how Israel is to worship Him. This is evident not only in the sacrifices but also in the construction of the temple and Tabernacle, where every detail is specified by God. Each subsection of the passage begins with the phrase "The Lord spoke to Moses," underscoring that this is not just Moses' idea or Israel's attempt to be relevant, but rather the authoritative command of God. The Hebrew word "savah" is used, indicating that this is not a suggestion, but a command with authority and force. Despite the constant temptation to adopt pagan practices from the nations around them, ancient Israel was reminded that God alone decides how he is to be worshiped. Though we may not have the same sacrifices and offerings, this principle still applies today: God is the one who determines how He is to be worshiped.

In the Reformed tradition, we call this the "regulative principle of worship." In worship, we only do what God has commanded. This simplifies worship, and when Christians commit themselves to follow this principle it puts an end to many disputes. Worship is not an avenue for us to express our creativity and freedom. Instead, it is a place where we bow before God's sovereign authority, acknowledging his grandeur and majesty.

A second principle reflected in the passage is the idea of the perpetuity of the worship of God. "Perpetuity" refers to the fact that something continues forever without end. This principle is reflected in verse 12, which describes the constant burning of the fire on the altar and the giving of burnt offerings as a perpetual and continual act of worship to the Lord. We also see it in verse 22, which speaks of the law of the offerings as something decreed forever. The perpetuity of the worship of God is not limited to the Levitical priesthood, but it is a principle that continues forever, as we will always need a priest to offer sacrifices and intercede for us. Christ fulfills this perpetual need as he continues to serve as our priest and once for all offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Although our proper worship is when we gather together to praise, hear the word, and pray to God, every aspect of our lives should be governed and directed by our religious impulse, with the aim of glorifying God in all that we do.

Today is the Lord's Day, which is God's day of rest and worship. From the beginning of the world to its end, we have this day as a perpetual institution for these holy purposes. Let us then take advantage of this day and the appointed times to worship, recognizing that it is a foretaste of the eternal worship we will enjoy in heaven with Christ.

Thirdly, this passage emphasizes the principle of holiness in Leviticus, which explains the difference between what is holy and unholy, clean and unclean, and what is common. The offerings in Leviticus reflect this principle, as they are wholly set apart and governed by rules and regulations. Some of the offerings are given to sustain and support the priesthood, which is set apart from Israel and has no inheritance in the land. The Israelites were to give a portion of their worship to feed and sustain the Levites. This principle of holiness extends to those who preach and teach, who should get their living from the gospel. By giving to support them, one is devoting oneself and one's life to the worship of God. The passage also previews the Holiness Codes in Leviticus, which detail what kinds of animals are considered clean and unclean.

We could spend some more time digging into the details of how this applied to the Levitical priesthood. But the general point is clearly still relevant for us as Christians today. The principle of holiness is fundamental to our lives in Christ. In 1 Peter 1:15 it says: "But as he who called you is holy, so also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, "You shall be holy. For I am holy." Peter takes this quote straight from Leviticus and applies it directly to the believer. Of course, this holiness does not primarily consist in external regulations for worship but of the holiness of the heart, life, and conduct. Christians have been separated from the world and live lives of consecration to God. True religion, according to James, consists largely in keeping oneself "unstained by the world" (James 1:27). By this he does not mean avoiding rubbing shoulders with sinners but devoting oneself to a life of purity and love. Jesus himself did that when calling them to repentance. Paul tells us that in order to do that we would have to leave the world! Instead, let us remember Christ has given us a Spirit whose name is "Holy." This Spirit dwells in our hearts to cleanse us from the source of our unholiness: indwelling sin. Let us then walk in the holiness of that Spirit to the glory of God.

#7 - Devotional Meditation on Leviticus 7:22-38

The key to this book is found in Leviticus 10:10: "You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them by Moses." Israel must learn some basic distinctions that will shape their entire life. In this chapter, the basic idea is that there are things that are set apart to the Lord himself. In other words, they must identify that which especially belongs to the Lord whether special times, people, and objects.

This principle of holiness applies not just to Israel but to all believers in Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism states, "I am not my own, but I belong body and soul, life and death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." Through Christ's redemption, we belong to him. Our entire lives are to be devoted to the Lord in a holy service (Rom. 12:1-4).

Leviticus Chapter 7 contains regulations regarding eating fat, eating blood, and wave offerings. Though at first glance, they may seem unrelated, the common thread that ties them together is the principle that there is that which belongs especially to the Lord.

First, there are the prohibitions regarding the fat of the offerings. A distinction should be kept in view between the visceral fat which is found in large chunks near the organs and the fat interwoven within the fibers of the muscle tissue. This provision applies to the visceral fat. It's not as if they had to spend hours trimming all the fat interwoven in the flesh. The fat of the meat was considered to be the best portion. This reinforces the principle that Israel is to give their best to God--not just the leftovers.

Second, there is also the prohibition against eating blood. Like the provision regarding fat, this is a ceremonial provision that has been fulfilled in Christ. Obviously, eating raw meat can have some risks connected to it with the presence of bacteria. But the passage is not teaching that it is ungodly to eat a rare steak. Besides, the red fluid you see in a rare steak is not blood although it does have a similar red color. It's called myoglobin and helps carry oxygen to the body's tissue.

But the reason for the prohibition is not primarily for health concerns about blood. The main reason is that the blood was set apart for a special use in worship, namely to be a symbol of atonement for sin. It was a type and picture of the blood of Christ which paid for our sins. Because it had a special and holy purpose it was set apart as holy to the Lord.

Finally, the passage describes the wave offering. It gets its name from the fact that the offering was to be lifted up by the priest and literally waved in his hand before the Lord. This offering was reserved for the priests and their families. Like the fat and the blood of these sacrifices, the tribe of Levi was set apart from the rest of Israel and devoted entirely to God in the maintenance of the worship of the Lord.

In the NT, Christ has come as our final high priest and put an end to the temporary Levitical order. The idea of a spiritual priesthood of all believers is clearly taught (1 Pet. 2:9). Just as God chose the tribe of Levi from the people of Israel, so God has chosen some from all nations and separated them from the rest of the fallen lot of men.

Our fundamental identity as God's people is that we are separate from the world and devoted entirely to the Lord. We still make the distinction between the holy and the common with six days for ordinary work and one day for a holy rest. Likewise, we still devote a portion of our substance to him in an offering to the Lord. Yet our lives in their entirety must be lived in consecrated service to God. We must present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is our spiritual act of worship with which the Triune God is pleased.

#8 - Devotional Meditation on Leviticus 8:1-36

Earlier in Leviticus, the focus has been on the offerings, which were a picture of the entire process of redemptions from justification to sanctification to the resultant state of peace and fellowship we have with God through Jesus Christ. Now the focus shifts from the offerings to the priests. Offerings alone are not sufficient to bring us to God. We not only need a substitute offering but also a substitute offerer in a priest. A priest does two basic things for us: he prays and he pays. He prays for sinners through his intercessory prayers, and he pays for sinners by offering a sacrifice to atone for our sins. This work was pictured by Aaron in the OT but fulfilled by Christ in the NT. This chapter points us to Jesus in the various details of the priest's consecration, work, and appearance.

There are several ways to see this in the passage, but we will briefly outline five of them.

First this passage reminds us that we must have a priest to approach God. While it is a simple general point, it is crucial not to overlook it. In modern society, especially in America, the emphasis is on individualism, which leads us to believe that we are primarily responsible for ourselves. There is truth in this point. We cannot absolve ourselves of personal responsibility for our sins. However, this mindset is not fully consistent with how God created us. In the beginning, Adam served as the head and representative of humanity. Following the fall, our sinful condition made it even more necessary for us to have a mediator, a priest, to serve on their behalf. This principle of mediation is evident throughout the Old Testament, with Moses functioning as a prophet, king, and priest throughout his time as the leader of Israel. The passage in Leviticus 8 highlights this principle, emphasizing the significance of having a priest, who ministers on behalf of the entire congregation. Aaron's priestly robes symbolize his representation of the twelve tribes of Israel. He bears on his very clothing the principle of mediation. The whole idea of presenting our "meritorious" good works to God runs counter to this principle. Our works are only acceptable to God on the gracious imputation of the works of another—our high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second point that directs us to Jesus' work in ordaining Aaron is his anointing. In verse 10, Moses anoints the Tabernacle, altar, utensils, and finally, Aaron and his sons. This act sets them apart from a common to a sacred use. The altar, being the place where God dwells, is especially holy and receives a sevenfold anointing and consecration. Aaron himself must also be anointed and consecrated with oil to serve as a typical high priest. This foreshadows Jesus, who was anointed as high priest at his baptism by John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit, who descended upon Jesus like a dove, was the visible sign and picture of his entrance into public ministry as the Messiah, mediator, prophet, priest, and king. This anointing consecrated and equipped Jesus with the power from above to perform all the actions of his ministry. The Spirit guided him and led him in his ministry, helped him resist the temptations of Satan, cast out demons, worked mighty miracles, and even offered himself as a sacrifice to God through the eternal spirit. Aaron's anointing was an external ritual and a sign, but Jesus' anointing with the Holy Spirit was the real fullness of power through which he accomplished everything necessary to be our redeemer.

Thirdly, In addition to Aaron's clothing, we must also pay close attention to the details in his attire, particularly in verse 5 and beyond. The passage describes how Aaron and his sons were washed with water before he donned his coat and tied a sash around his waist. He then clothed himself with a robe and an ephod, attaching a woven band to it. The breastpiece, adorned with stones representing the twelve tribes, was then placed on his chest, along with the Urim and Thummim, which served as a means for seeking God's will in special circumstances. The priestly attire was completed with a turban and a golden plate with a holy crown on it, making Aaron a royal priest.

This description of Aaron's high priestly attire corresponds to the depiction of Jesus in the Book of Revelation. John, while exiled on the Isle of Patmos, saw a vision of the risen Christ, who was dressed in a long robe with a golden sash around his chest. The imagery of white hair, fiery eyes, and bronze feet alluded to the high priestly attire of Aaron.

The significance of these garments extends beyond external ritual garments, as they point to the glory of Christ as the ultimate high priest. While Aaron was a sinner, clothed in external attire to remind us of our need for a priest, Jesus entered into his high priestly ministry after his resurrection, surpassing the glory of Aaron's attire. The priestly garments of Jesus not only represent external attire but also the glory within him as the risen savior.

Fourthly, we have a picture in Aaron of the sinlessness of Jesus. In order to be our final high priest, Christ had to be sinless. The fact that Aaron himself requires consecration, cleansing, and sacrifice in his ordination reminds us that he is not the final high priest. He must make an offering for himself as well as for the people. In both their persons and in their ministerial activity they fall short of God's righteous standards. Although the priesthood is fulfilled in Christ, this principle remains true for ordained leaders in the church. They are not Jesus. They are sinners like the rest of the congregation. God is pleased to show his power through human weakness. At the same time, the resultant external glory of the priest points us to what Christ would be internally and fully: glorious, sinless, and truly set apart as holy to the Lord.

This leads us to the final point. This passage emphasizes that Aaron and his sons served as a picture of the need for a high priest, but ultimately it is Christ and his work that surpasses them. The Book of Hebrews describes Jesus as the greater high priest, who upholds his priesthood permanently and is able to save those who draw near to God through him. Unlike Aaron and his sons, who needed forgiveness and redemption, Jesus had no sin and offered himself as a sacrifice once for all. He is greater than Adam and grants us his life in return for our sins. As our priest, he intercedes for us through the power of his indestructible life. This passage reminds us that we need a priest, and Jesus is the perfect one. Let us thank God for our gracious Savior, who makes atonement for our sins, cleanses us, and grants us the Holy Spirit. May we be made fit to serve Him in this life and one day enter into perfect fellowship and peace with Him forever.

#9 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 9:1-24

One challenge in studying the book of Leviticus is its apparent repetitiveness. We have heard many elements of this passage before. The various offerings and provisions for the priests and the works all appear again. But God is not unnecessarily redundant. He has a distinct point and purpose in everything he says.

In this chapter, the new and distinctive element is what results from the execution of the priestly provisions. It is described in an inclusio that brackets or surrounds the passage. In verses 6 and 23 we read about the appearance of the glory of the Lord. In response, the people fall down on their faces in worship. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The chief end of the ceremonial provisions in Leviticus is that God's glory might be revealed to Israel. Since these things are fulfilled for us in Christ, we also through them behold the glory of God in Jesus.

Today we will meditate on this theme of the revelation of God's glory. First, we will see how this point was revealed in the revelation leading up to this. Secondly, we will see how it comes to its culmination in our present passage in chapter 9.

If we go back to Exodus 16, right after the Lord led the people out of Egypt and demonstrated his glory and power in his victory over Pharaoh, we encounter the story of God providing manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. In verses 6 and 7, we read that the Lord brought them out of Egypt and promised to reveal his glory to them in the morning, as a response to their grumbling. Later in verse 10, Aaron addresses the People of Israel and they witness the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, which was the theophany that gave visible appearance to God, revealed his infinite, eternal, and unchangeable nature in a visible form. In these things the glory of the Lord is revealed!

In Exodus 24, Moses ascends Mount Sinai, where the cloud covers the mountain, signifying the presence of God. The glory of the Lord dwells on the mountain, and the cloud covers it for six days. On the seventh day, Moses emerges from the cloud, having been called by God, and witnesses the glory of the Lord, which appears as a devouring fire on the mountain. Moses enters the cloud and remains on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. The cloud reveals God's power, justice, and wrath against sin as a holy God who appears as fire and glory. Moses, as a mediator and priest, stands between God and the people. Later he visibly reflects this glory through his shining face as seen by the people. He is a picture and type of the glory of Jesus, our final mediator.

Indeed, we can look elsewhere in Exodus 33 where Moses asks to see God's glory and says, "Show me your glory." God states that no human being can look at his glory and live, but he will let Moses see the afterglow of it. He hides Moses in the cleft of the rock and protects him as the Lord passes before him, allowing him to see his glory. The glory of God is his presence, and due to our sin since the Garden of Eden, humanity has been cast out of that glorious presence. Everything that God does after that is ultimately to bring us back into his presence once again. The purpose of redemption is to reveal God's glory and provide a way for us to participate in it for our blessedness and restoration. All things serve the ultimate end of the glory of God.

Everything God has done has been preparing the way for the provisional fulfillment of God's glory coming to the people. In this passage, we see this purpose come to fruition.

First, we see God's glory revealed in the appearance of the priest. Remember, God's glory is going to be restored through the work of a priest. It will not come through our own work and effort. Note how the apostle Paul describes our fallen state in the fact that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). It is through the redemption we have in Christ Jesus, God's priest, that we attain this glory.

It's important to understand that there's something special about the priest and the way he's adorned that sets him apart as the one who will bring us into the presence of the glory of the Lord.

We can see this in the priest's clothing, as described in 8:5. He was to wear a coat, a sash, a robe, an ephod, a breastpiece, a turban, and a golden plate. All of these items have a purpose in helping the priest reflect the glory of God. As we read in Exodus 28:2, the reason for making these holy garments for Aaron and his brother was "for glory and for beauty." The priest's clothing was designed to make him stand out in the sanctuary, reflecting the glory of the Lord through the light of the candles and the fire. The jewels and the gold with which he was adorned would have glimmered with glory as they reflected the fires that illuminated the sanctuary.

Through the priest, a reflection of the glory of God was coming upon the people. Jonathan Edwards gives a helpful illustration of the moon reflecting the light of the sun onto the darkness of the earth. Similarly, the priest's white clothing, jewels, and shiny metal reflected the glory of God onto the people, as if the people were experiencing the presence of God through the priest.

Second, we see God's glory in their acts of ministry. What does he need to do to bring them to that glory? He must first make a sacrifice and offering for himself, and then for the sins of the people. We covered this in detail in the earlier chapters, but let us remind ourselves of their distinctive purpose. The offerings include a sin offering, a burnt offering, a peace offering, and a grain offerings.

The burnt offering is the sacrifice of atonement where the worshipper would identify with the animal being sacrificed, recognizing that they deserve death, and the animal will take their place. The result is a bloody mess graphically illustrating the fact that sin deserves death. Next, the grain offering represents the consecration of one's life in service to God. Unlike the burnt offering, this offering does not involve blood since plants do not bleed. The worshipper presents their life as an offering to God, which requires year-round work and a devoted life. Next is the peace offering indicates fellowship shared as if at a family meal between the Lord, the worshipper and the priest. They all take a portion of the offering and eat it together, symbolizing peace and fellowship. Finally, there is the sin offering for specific individual sins that may have been committed after their restoration into communion with God.

And what happened when everything was finished? Verse 20 states that the fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and pieces of fat on the altar as the glory of the Lord appeared to the people. Our entire Christian life starts with believing in the blood sacrifice of Jesus, which brings forgiveness of our sins. We then devote ourselves to sanctified service and fellowship with God, continually turning to Him because of our imperfections and sins, and coming before Him through Jesus, the great High Priest. Through His work, He renews us day by day from glory to glory, making us ready to dwell in His presence. We have seen how the priestly work involves not only offering but also a blessing, as demonstrated in the Aaronic benediction. When the minister pronounces this blessing, they are asking for God's glorious presence to be with and rest upon the people. On this day, when everything was completed and the blessing was pronounced, the people saw the invisible spiritual effect of the priest's blessing upon them - the glory of the Lord being with them.

As we noted earlier, our sin means that we have fallen short of the glory of God. By faith we trust the Lord and give glory to him, having been restored to fellowship with him by grace. Let us therefore not only have this glory before our eyes in the types of the OT and their fulfillment in the NT, but may it dwell in our hearts as we await its final fulness in the world to come.

#10 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 10:1-7

How important is worship to our one true God? On one level, it might seem like it shouldn't be that significant, right? After all, the Lord is the God of heaven and earth, and he doesn't stand in need of anything. He himself gives life and breath to all the world and everything in it. He certainly doesn't need any of our possessions, nor does he need any emotional affirmation from us to reinforce his glory. In fact, due to our creaturely nature, we can only reflect a finite copy of the truth of God, let alone offer anything meaningful to Him. Moreover, worship in itself isn't pleasing to God; it's only pleasing to him because of his gracious acceptance of it. It's tempting to conclude from this that human beings and our worship of God aren't that important to Him. But in reality, when we look at the scriptures, the opposite is true. As we saw in the last passage, the end goal of redemption through the work of God's priest is that his glory be revealed and that his people fall down and worship him.

Worship has been central to our relationship with God from the beginning. When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden. When they sinned against God, they did so with respect to the worship of God. God gave them two trees - the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - which He set up as sacraments through which they would worship and serve the Lord. He told them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, when Satan tempted Adam and Eve, he did so specifically with respect to how they would worship God. Satan lied to them and convinced them that if they ate from that tree, they would become like God. In doing so, Satan sought to lead them to idolatry in their worship.

The work of redemption and the goal that God has in view in restoring mankind to Himself is that we would worship Him properly. Jesus tells us that the true worshippers of God will worship him in Spirit and in truth. Even in the Book of Revelation, the final picture of mankind is that the dwelling of God is with man, and they sing endless praise and worship to God. From the beginning of history to its end, God requires worship because of who He is and His greatness. Our core purpose as human beings is to love and worship him with all that we have and all that we are.

If you don't think worship is important to God, then you haven't been paying attention to the book of Leviticus. From the beginning, this book has been about how Israel is to worship the Lord. So far, we have had nine detailed chapters explaining how the priests and the people are to approach God in sacrifice and offering, with copious detail directed to the priests and the Levites. But as we come to Leviticus Chapter 10, a grand contrast is created. In contrast to the forgiveness, light, life, and glory that comes when they approach God according to His commandment, we see the opposite. Nadab and Abihu approach God in worship in a way that He has not commanded, contrary to His word. Instead of light, life, and glory, the result is darkness and death.

Do you see the contrast? To approach God in worship according to his word is life and glory. To approach God with our own ideas is idolatry and death.

First, let us take a moment to reflect and appreciate the stark narrative contrast between Chapter 10:1-7 and what preceded it in Leviticus. As it has been several weeks since we last looked at Leviticus, this is not only important to understand the passage but also an opportunity to review what we previously studied. In Leviticus 9, we saw the culmination of everything written so far in the book, including the priests' ordination, their dress and activity, and the different offerings. All of these preparatory measures lead up to the events described in Chapter 10. Once Aaron completes his work the glory of the Lord appears to them. Fire comes out from before the Lord and consumes the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar. The people shout and fall on their faces in awe. This is the purpose of all that God has instituted in his worship, to cleanse sinners with the blood of a substitute and bring them into fellowship with the Lord, so they may commune with him in his holy temple and behold his very presence. When God is rightly worshipped his grace and glory is revealed.

However, chapter 10 reveals a stark contrast to the proper worship described in chapter 9. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, took the censer and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. Regardless of what led to their actions, they pursued their own will and ideas for worship, and the result was a grand contrast to the glory and light of the Lord appearing for their life and salvation. The glory and fire of the Lord appeared for their judgment instead. It is a reminder that even as God presents typical ordinances of clean and unclean, holy and common, he is also setting before them life and death.

Worship, therefore, truly is a matter of life and death. God's commandments are the sole authority governing how we are to worship him. In our Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, we call this the regulative principle of worship. This means that in worship, what is not commanded by God is forbidden. We only do in worship what God explicitly commands; if He hasn't explicitly commanded it, we don't do it. This stands in contrast to the normative principle of worship, which says that if God hasn't explicitly forbidden it, we can do it. The normative principle is very broad; unless you can find a specific commandment saying you can't do this, it's fair game. The regulative principle, however, says that we need a specific mandate from God for whatever we do in worship.

This principle applies not only in the Old Testament but also in New Testament worship. In the rest of our lives, outside of organized worship, we have greater liberty. If the Lord doesn't speak directly about it in the word, we are free to make wise decisions on the basis of Christian principles. For example, the Bible doesn't tell you what kind of car to drive, at what restaurant at which you are to eat, or what particular job you are to take. You take into account the basic principles of the word and make the best decision you can. However, in worship, God has a narrower set of requirements, and that narrow set of requirements is that if He hasn't commanded it, we shouldn't do it. That principle is expressed in this passage, where it describes what Nadab and Abihu did: they took a censor, put fire on it, laid incense on it, and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. The mere fact that God did not command it makes it something that is forbidden.

How would this apply today? When we read the New Testament and observe the examples of Jesus and the apostles, as well as the commandments of Scripture, we learn what we should do in worship. When we read Paul's letters, which were read in worship, we find greetings pronounced to the people from God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We also find a call to worship, in which the Lord summons the people to come and worship Him, and we respond by singing songs of praise. Scripture is publicly read, and the Word is preached. Jesus ordained only two sacraments to be observed in worship: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Additionally, we offer prayers and give offerings for the poor and the support of the ministry. We also confess our faith in Jesus as Lord as part of our worship. On some occasions, when people become members, they may take solemn oaths and vows. These are the things that Scripture tells us we ought to do.

But why? Notice what all these elements have in common: they are all defined by and focused on the word of God. Worship is essentially a dialogue between God and his people. It is focused on words. The reason God defines worship in this way points us to the way we are saved. How we worship reflects our understanding of how we are saved. We are saved through the word of God. Through the reading and preaching of God's word faith is created and nourished. While we do have two sacraments to visibly signify and seal God's grace, they take their power and effectiveness only from God's word.

Likewise, in the OT the ceremonial provisions were not mere commandments based on the arbitrary will of God. Embedded within them was a picture of the Gospel of Christ our High Priest and Sacrifice. To change the order or elements of worship was therefore (by implication) to change the work of our Lord Jesus Christ and rob him of his glory. It is also to change our understanding of the way of salvation. That is why in the Roman and Eastern communions the focus on the "visual" with the worship of images goes hand in hand with the introduction of meritorious works in our salvation. We walk by faith and not by sight. We are saved by grace through faith, not on the basis of works.

Perhaps now you see the value and importance of the regulative principle. Its beautiful simplicity not only maintains peace among humans who are constantly prone to argue, but it also keeps us safely along the narrow path of salvation. It guides us, again and again, to find refuge in God through his word and in no other place.

The story of Nadab and Abihu is a stark reminder that outside of God's word, there is destruction and death. In God's word alone are salvation, life, light, and glory.

#10B - Devotional Meditation on Leviticus 10:4-20

Have you ever felt like your family has problems? Occasionally, we may think about issues involving our siblings, parents, uncles, or children and feel overwhelmed. However, have you ever considered how Aaron and his family, who served as priests in the Old Testament, dealt with their family problems?

In Leviticus 10, we are reminded that the leadership of the nation of Israel was a family affair at that time. The priesthood, especially the high priesthood, was closely related, with Aaron's family having a prominent role. As we read through the Book of Leviticus, we may forget that the priests who ministered were close family relatives, who were familiar with one another. However, it is often the case that children of ministers or missionaries become so used to dealing with church-related matters that it becomes ordinary to them. They grow up doing church-related activities every day, and it becomes what they're used to doing.

On this particular day, it was not a good one for Aaron's family. It started with Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who were put to death for violating God's commandments in worship. They were instructed to only worship God as commanded. However, they offered unauthorized incense before the Lord, which was forbidden, and were consumed with fire. As a result, Aaron's family was filled with grief.

In verse 6, God tells Eliezer and Ithamar, the other sons of Aaron, not to mourn by letting their hair hang loose or tearing their clothes, or they would die, and wrath would come upon all the congregation. They were instructed to keep their grief within them and not express it, as human grief was less important than the honor and glory of God. In verse 12, Moses speaks directly to Eliezer and Ithamar, giving them instructions on how to do everything exactly as God had said. However, in verse 16, they allow the goat of the sin offering to be entirely burned up, violating God's commandment.

The outcome for Eliezer and Ithamar was different from that of Nadab and Abihu. Instead of immediate judgment and punishment, Moses appealed to God on the basis of his grief and expressed mercy and grace. Moses approved the situation as it stood, even though Eliezer and Ithamar had violated God's law.

The question before us in considering the passage is this: What is the difference between the scene with Nadab and Abihu against the one with Eliezer and Ithamar? Why does God's wrath come upon the first set of brothers, but not on the second?

First, it is clear that the difference does not lie in the fact that one set of brothers sinned and the others didn't. Indeed, both sinned in a direct way against God's holy commandments with respect to worship. There is nothing unequal about the heinousness of their sins in this respect. Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized incense before the Lord. Eliezer and Ithamar allowed the sacrifice to be entirely consumed by the fire. Both were done in violation of God's commandments.

Although their sins are not radically different, the outcome certainly is! Having offered unauthorized, Nadab and Abihu are consumed by the fire of the Lord. Eliezer and Ithamar allow the sacrifice to be entirely consumed, and Moses comes as the mediator with a patient inquiry and eventual mercy. In the one there is the immediate judgment of God through fire, while in the other there is the mediation of Moses bringing the delay and eventual removal of judgment.

What is the reason for this difference? First, consider the different circumstances. Eliezer and Ithamar are ministering in the context of family grief and sadness. They are not to visibly express their grief. Instead, they express their grief by refusing to eat. This is a typical expression of mourning for human beings. Aaron points this out to Moses. Essentially he says: "I have lost my two sons today. Eliezer and

Ithamar just lost their brothers. Shall I eat a festive meal of celebration when God's wrath and justice are revealed against us?" Nadab and Abihu sinned in a very different circumstances. Eliezzer and Ithamar sin when things are sad and difficult. Nadab and Abihu sin when things are good and easy.

All sin is equally sin, but there is a difference between a high-handed sin and a sin of weakness. God takes these things into account when dealing with us in our sins and shortcomings. Thankfully, we have a high priest who is sympathetic to us in our weakness. He was in all things tempted just as we are and yet was without sin.

Secondly, note the difference in the element of worship

The incense represents the prayers of the saints and the devotion of their lives to God. There is no mention of them offering a blood sacrifice. There is a fundamental absence But what about Eliezzer and Ithamar? Their sin relates to the sin offering in which they bear the iniquity of the congregation in their guilt before the Lord. In placing this offering before the Lord, the heart of the Gospel was still honored. They acknowledge their sin and the sin of the people before God. Their struggle was with fully grasping the joy of this greater reality in the face of earthly sadness.

This is very similar to the struggle we have as Christians. We know Christ has come and died for us. We know that our joy in this fact should overwhelm all other trials and sorrows. Yet we are weak and often fail to feel the heavenly joy of the fruits of Christ's work. God is merciful. Instead of chiding us for our lack of joy, he brings his patience, comfort, and mercy.

Thirdly, there is also a difference between to two sets of brothers in the way God deals with them. Through Nadab and Abihu he deals immediately and directly. But through Eliezzer and Ithamar he comes to them through a mediator. If we approach God on our own, we have only our sin to offer. The only possible outcome of coming before God by ourselves in our sinfulness is that we will be consumed by the searing purity of his holiness. But when God allows us to approach him through a mediator his mercy and grace will allow us to draw near to his holy presence.

The Scriptures tell us that at the end of the day, there is no difference between men. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The only thing that makes us differ from one another is the measure of grace that he freely chooses to bestow upon us.

In reading these passages we are therefore sobered. We are God's children and part of his family. Family members sometimes grow too familiar with one another and take things for granted. The same can be true for us with God and his grace. Let us never forget that his grace is not something that we can ever deserve. Nor is it something to which we are entitled. Every sin we commit deserves immediate judgment and death. The only reason we continue to exist day by day is due to his sovereign grace. This grace comes to us through Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man. He has borne our sins in his once for all offering of himself on the cross. In this, he fully reveals the grace of God. As we grasp these things by faith, we can experience the joy of heaven amid the sorrows of the earth. Whether it be the loss of possessions or even our dearest loved ones, God's mercy and forgiveness are near to us through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

#10-C - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 10:10-11

Distinctions are crucially important in life. One might think that if we didn't bother with clear definitions of things, it would make life easier and reduce arguments, but this is not the case. For example, if an 8-

year-old boy believed he was a Mack truck and tried to stop one, he would be in serious danger. Similarly, if a regular guy believed he was an NFL player and tried to join a training session, they would likely get injured. There is obviously some humor in these examples, but they are clear reminders that distinctions are important.

God's creation also emphasizes the importance of distinctions. There is a difference between God and man, and even within God, there are distinctions between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When reading Leviticus 10:10-11, Moses highlights some of the most basic spiritual distinctions that shape the way we should view our lives in this world. Although much of what is described in this book no longer applies in the New Testament, the distinction between what is holy and what is common, and what is clean and what is unclean, remains absolutely crucial. This verse is, in fact, a key to understanding the underlying spiritual substance of the book.

In OT times, God made everything in the people's lives a visual representation of fundamental spiritual principles. By reminding them visually of what it meant to be holy and clean, they were constantly being taught these principles. Therefore, it is essential to understand the meaning behind the various regulations described in Leviticus, even if some of them seem odd or irrelevant to modern life.

While the types and shadows illustrated these distinctions in a visible way, let us not forget that in the OT just as much as in the NT the primary means of instruction was God's word. So Leviticus 10:11 says that the priests are to "teach" the people all the commandments of the law, especially (as the context indicates) these distinctions between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean. While Israel experienced visual representations of these concepts through their daily lives, such as the rituals and offerings performed by the priests, teaching was still crucial.

Despite the detailed regulations that the priests had to adhere to, teaching was one of their primary functions. The prophets, on the other hand, provided special occasions when there was a need for revelation from God. However, the priests had the daily obligation of basic instruction, and it was primarily through teaching that spiritual principles were written on the heart.

We can see examples of this in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Chronicles 15. In Second Kings 17:27, the king of Assyria commands the people of Israel to send one of the priests they carried away from Israel to dwell there and teach the law of the God of the land. Even the pagan king sees the need for a teaching priest! Similarly, in 2 Chronicles 15:3, the prophet Azariah laments that for a long time, Israel was without the true God, a teaching priest, and without the law. The prophet coordinates these different ideas because the teaching of the priest and the law are the primary ways that God is present with and reveals himself to his people. Even in the Old Testament, where sacraments and ceremonies were emphasized, the teaching of the word of God remained the fundamental and primary way for God's people to learn.

Malachi 2:6-7 clearly speaks of the priest's fundamental duty to teach the people God's ways in these matters: "True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts."

As it was in the OT with the priests, so even more so in the NT with Christian pastors. Today God's word is absolutely foundational and central to our lives. Giving ourselves to God's teaching is the main way he spiritually feeds and nourishes us. Fundamentally, learning to distinguish between the holy and the

unclean is not just about ceremonial rights and external cleanness or uncleanness, but about the uncleanness of the heart and the life, and how one can be cleansed in their walk with God.

But we need to also consider the meaning of these basic distinctions. The first one Moses mentions is the difference between the holy and the common. This refers to things that are set apart and special over against things that are common and ordinary. Neither is inherently evil. God created both and each one has its proper place in our lives. But they are not to be confused.

Essentially holy things have to do with the worship of God. In the OT there were holy things or objects associated with temple worship (the temple itself, its furnishings, the washings, the sacrifices, the priests, etc). There were also sacred times set apart for worship (festivals, new moons, and the Sabbath day). Even in the Garden of Eden, this distinction governed human life before God. Our first parents were given six days for ordinary work, but the seventh day was a special day of holy rest. They were allowed to eat any tree of the garden for their ordinary nourishment. But two trees were set apart to serve a sacramental function (i.e., the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil).

Today these distinctions still apply but in a way appropriate to the NT era. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are simpler and fewer in number than those of the OT. But in them, God sets temporarily sets apart common things for a holy use. The principle of sacred time also still applies, as one day in seven is set apart, especially for the worship of the one true God.

We need to be careful to recognize this basic distinction when it comes to our worship. For example, this principle should govern and inform our approach to God in the elements of worship. Sometimes churches essentially make their times of congregational singing sound and feel like a rock concert. There is nothing inherently wrong with popular music as a style. But if we introduce it (especially the performance elements) into worship, we begin to mix what is holy with what is common. God would have us keep those things distinct.

The other distinction Moses speaks of is that between the clean and the unclean. The meaning of this distinction is more obvious. To be clean is to have been washed of filth. To be unclean is to be dirty. God helps Israel understand these spiritual realities by applying them to the animal kingdom. It's not hard to understand why this would be helpful to the Israelites. If you saw your children outside playing with a dead bird or a mouse, you would probably run out and tell them to stop and immediately have them wash their hands! God uses these natural instincts in each of us to reinforce a spiritual principle in the distinction between the clean and the unclean.

As Jesus reminds us, this distinction ultimately isn't about our external lives. It points us to the fundamental realities of God's salvation as applied to our hearts by faith. Sin is everywhere and has made our hearts utterly filthy. We cannot wash ourselves, but need God to cleanse us. It is not what goes into us that makes us unclean, but the evil that comes out of us that defiles us before God.

To enter into heaven we must be cleansed of sin. It says of the new Jerusalem that "...nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). The great desire of the justified Christian is to be fully cleansed from sin through the process of sanctification. Like the leper before Jesus, we realize the filthiness of our hearts and plead before him: "If you are willing you can make me clean." To him and to us Jesus declares: "I am willing, be clean!" (Mark 1:40-45). So also in the temple worship, there were not just blood sacrifices to atone for sin (mainly pointing to our justification), there were also purifying washings to remove their

uncleanness (indicating the Spirit's work of sanctification). These rites remained distinct, but could not be separated as essential parts of their life before God.

In Jesus, we have one who came and took to himself ordinary human flesh, but consecrated it to a sacred purpose in his life, ministry, and obedience (Luke 1:35). He was like us in every way except for sin (Heb. 2:16, 4:15). Although we are unholy, he was holy, righteous, innocent, and perfect. He bore our unholy sin on his holy flesh, paying its debt on the cross. Through him, we are separated unto God and belong to him, and live lives of consecrated service as a living sacrifice. Although now we sojourn in a world where we remain at a crossroad between earth and heaven (the holy and the common) one day we will dwell forever in an eternally sacred place, worshipping him with ceaseless joy.

May God complete his cleansing work in our lives, day by day conforming us to the image of his son in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

#11 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 11

When I was a child, we took many school field trips to the zoo. I grew up in Lynden, which was relatively close to Vancouver. One of the places we visited was the Vancouver Game Farm. It's a unique zoo where you can drive through and observe all the animals. I always enjoyed watching and comparing the animals, noting their similarities and differences. A few years ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Lion Park in South Africa. Contrary to its name, it's not a typical playground. It's an actual park with lions roaming freely, and you can drive through it. It was a thrilling experience, especially since I drove through it in a tiny European car, which made the lions appear even larger. The entrance sign that caught my attention read, "No soft-roofed cars allowed." Apparently common sense is sometimes lacking not only in the USA but in other countries as well.

In addition to lions, the park also housed tigers, cheetahs, and other species. It was fascinating to compare and contrast the characteristics of different cat species. We do this with other animals as well, and can easily start putting animals in different categories. If you took any zoology classes in school, you would have learned that the name for this practice of categorization is the word "taxonomy." A taxonomy is a method of organizing and arranging different things, and it can be used to classify anything from plants or sports teams. In Leviticus 11 we have a spiritual taxonomy of the animals to teach Israel some fundamental distinctions that are foundational to their lives before God. In this context, more important that the difference between reptiles, mammals, and insects is the distinction between the clean and the unclean.

Let's start by examining this passage and understanding the Lord's different classifications of animals. How many classifications are there? At the end of the chapter, in verse 46, the Lord summarizes the various categories of animals: first, there are the animals that walk and dwell on the Earth, the beasts; secondly, there are the birds that fly in the air; thirdly, every living creature that moves through the waters; and finally, every creature that swarms on the ground. Although some of these groups have very different animals, they all have in common that they inhabit either the earth, air, water, or ground. We don't have the space to outline everything in detail. Let us simply consider the beasts on the earth, which are described in verse 1 and following. Here, the Lord divides them into two kinds: clean and unclean. The clean ones, as mentioned in verse 3, have cloven hooves and chew the cud. What does it mean to have cloven hooves? This means that the toes of the animal's foot are separated into two parts. For example, a rabbit has paws instead of cloven hooves, making it unclean. Therefore, clean animals must have both characteristics.

To chew the cud means that the animal digests its food once, regurgitates it, and chews it again before swallowing. Although the details of this process are complicated, it is an essential aspect of clean animals. For example, cows have multiple stomachs to digest their food, and the Lord designed their digestion for a reason. If an animal lacks one of these two characteristics, it is unclean, such as the camel, which chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, or the rabbit, which has cloven hooves but does not chew the cud.

We could go on and consider all the other divisions and distinctions in the other areas of the animal kingdom outlined in this passage. The point is that the Lord has created a spiritual taxonomy by distinguishing between clean and unclean animals. He has found specific identifiable markers that differentiate them. These classifications serve as a reminder to the Israelites about what they can and cannot eat, and touching the carcasses of unclean animals will make them unclean. So also there is a difference between the impurity of sin and the purity of righteousness, whether in our motives, thoughts, words, or deeds. Just as Israel was given the wisdom to identify the natural differences between the animals, so we are given spiritual wisdom to discern good from evil. The natural world is harnessed to reinforce a spiritual lesson.

But note how the text contains another provision that points them more directly to these spiritual realities. In verse 39, it says that if an animal that they can eat dies, whoever touches its carcass will be unclean until evening, regardless of whether they are considered clean or unclean. This detail is included in the midst of a discussion about clean and unclean animals, highlighting the universal truth that all creatures, regardless of their classification, will eventually die. The purpose of this passage is not primarily to provide dietary guidelines, although it does touch on that topic, but to teach a spiritual lesson about the distinction between what is pure and holy and what is defiled. Death is the ultimate defiler, rendering even clean animals unclean, and it serves as a reminder of Israel's fundamental problem: their sin. By setting apart the entire animal kingdom, God is using it as a canvas to teach this lesson to the Israelites. While the animal kingdom may bear some resemblance to humans, the similarities only serve to highlight the vast difference between them, with humans being made in God's image. This distinction between the clean and unclean would be ever-present in the Israelites' daily lives, reminding them to walk in purity and holiness.

In the OT God harnessed and used almost everything in their earthly lives to teach them spiritual lessons. Every day was a field trip to God's spiritual zoo. Ultimately God was teaching them the distinction between the clean and the unclean. They were to live lives separate from the sinful corruption of the world. This could not be done in their own power of strength, and defilement was not just a possibility but an inevitability given the remnants of sin that lie within their hearts.

Although the details are a little complicated, the basic message is simple and clear: we are defiled deep within our hearts. This defilement will manifest itself in our sinful thoughts, words, and actions. But God has made a provision by which we can be made clean through Christ the Lamb of God and the Holy Spirit. As we possess that cleansing blood and purifying Spirit, so also we are to walk in it. In these types and shadows, we receive heavenly wisdom to navigate the filthy paths of the earth, shunning that which corrupts and defiles us even as we pursue the purity of God.

#12 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 12:1-8

Imagine if you were part of a group of church leaders who were trying to come up with ideas to get more people to come to church. Frustrated with their lack of progress, they simply decided to close their eyes and randomly open the Bible to find the text for next week's sermon. After moving their finger along the columns with their eyelids shut, they finally settle on a page earlier in the OT. When they open their eyes they realize they have landed on Leviticus 12 and the subject of ceremonial uncleanness related to a woman's menstrual cycles and the process of childbirth. Most of us would probably react in horror at the thought of having to teach publically on such a passage. I doubt anyone would think it would be a subject that would attract a large audience.

If we were honest with ourselves and we were the ones to decide what belonged in the Bible, this passage probably wouldn't make the cut. But God has chosen to place it in the Bible. Just as the entire animal world became a canvas upon which basic spiritual lessons (i.e. clean vs. unclean) were displayed, so God also utilized the basic cycles and process of human life related to reproduction. In them all, we see the patterns that inform the work of our Lord Jesus Christ and our lives of consecrated devotion to him.

First, let's clarify the regulations mentioned in this passage. There are two main regulations: the first deals with the uncleanness of a woman after giving birth to a child, whether male or female. The second regulation deals with the monthly menstrual cycle of a woman. Let's focus on the first regulation briefly mentioned in verse 2 and repeated in verse 5. After a woman gives birth, she is considered unclean for seven days. If she gives birth to a female child, she is considered unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation. This law is further elaborated in Leviticus Chapter 15, which deals with bodily discharges. Verse 19 states that if a woman has a discharge of blood during her menstrual cycle, she is considered ceremonially unclean for seven days, and whoever touches her will also be unclean until evening. During this period of uncleanness, she is not allowed to enter the temple or participate in worship. If her cycle lasts longer than seven days, she remains unclean until it stops, and then seven more days must pass before she is considered clean. This regulation is fulfilled by the Lord Jesus, so it is no longer necessary to follow it. Nevertheless, this text outlines the ceremonial uncleanness that a woman experiences during her menstrual cycle.

A second set of rules applies to women in the context of childbirth, delivery, and recovery. For a male child, there is a seven-day period of ceremonial uncleanness, which starts at the time of his birth and ends on the eighth day when he is circumcised. After that, the woman is considered ceremonially unclean for an additional 33 days. This period of purification lasts a total of 40 days. If a female child is born, there is a 14-day period of ceremonial uncleanness, followed by an additional 66 days of purification, making it 80 days in total.

It may seem unfair that there are different laws for boys and girls, but there is a reason for it. The boy's circumcision emphasizes his inherent uncleanness and sinfulness, while the girl does not have this sacrament. The point being made in this passage about human sin and uncleanness is already emphasized with boys (with their circumcision), so their period of uncleanness is shorter. On the other hand, the period of purification for girls is longer because they did not receive circumcision.

When the period of purification is completed, a burnt offering and sin offering are made to acknowledge and atone for the mother's sinfulness. The offering is a lamb, a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or turtle dove for the sin offering. If a woman cannot afford a lamb, two pigeons or two turtle doves can be used instead.

Although the process may seem complicated, it is important to remember that it served to teach Israel about sin. Furthermore, it provided a hidden mercy for women to recover from childbirth, which has always been a dangerous and painful experience, especially in those times. While it may seem harsh to restrict a woman's involvement in worship during this period, it was a way to relieve her burden and allow her the necessary time to recover. It is not uncommon even today for a mother to stay home from church for a couple of Sundays (or more) after giving birth to fully recover.

There is a theological point being made here regarding the period of uncleanness after childbirth and during a woman's menstruation. First, let's clarify what it isn't. Biblically speaking, women are not somehow more sinful than men. Later on, there will be things unique to men that will make them ceremonially unclean. Man and woman are fundamentally the same as image bearers before God in both body and soul. But they were created differently. They have different bodies, roles, gifts, and capabilities. This difference does not mean that one is better or worse than the other.

There is a strong theological basis for the explicit reminder of sin and uncleanness during these times in a woman's life. After our first fall into sin, the primary way in which a woman would experience the effects of sin in her life is through childbearing. Genesis 3:16 tells us that God said to the woman, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." In her family life and childbearing process, a woman will experience the reminder and pain of the curse of sin. We can't know what it would have been like for a woman to give birth before the fall as far as the pain and trauma are concerned. Still, we do know that there is an element of curse and pain associated with childbearing due to sin. This pain is not just from the time that labor starts and the baby is born, nor is it just from conception until birth. It's throughout a woman's life as her body develops and is capable of bearing children. That pain in childbearing is there because of sin. It's easy to observe during labor and childbirth, but it's also present in a child's development as she grows into a young woman and throughout their adult life. Even when a woman is old, she may experience a special pain when her children go through terrible things. This is an effect of sin, especially as it affects a woman through childbearing.

Secondly, it's important to remember that the period of ceremonial uncleanness was a regular reminder not only for the woman of the family but for the whole family that our lives are filled with uncleanness. Although this might seem to be a private matter affecting only the mother, the restrictions placed on her during this time would affect the entire family. For example, if they needed to attend worship, they would have to ensure that the mother was cared for or attended to. This was a reminder from God to Israel of our uncleanness as sinners. As we discussed last week, God designated certain creatures as clean and unclean, and this distinction was also woven into the fabric of family life through these periods of uncleanness.

Thirdly and finally, one of the theological bases for this practice is the fact that our children are conceived and born in sin and uncleanness. Scripture speaks of our sinfulness not only at birth but from the time of conception, as Psalm 51 indicates. The whole process of childbirth, from conception to delivery, is marked by uncleanness and sinfulness. Although men do not give birth, they too are sinful and unclean. The idea of a man giving birth is amusing, but it highlights the fact that our children are born in sin and corruption, inheriting it from their parents. The period of ceremonial uncleanness serves as a vivid reminder of this fact, and after it ends, a sin offering must be made to atone for the woman's unrighteousness.

What does all of this have to do with Jesus? Absolutely everything! When we read the story of Jesus's birth in Luke 2 and compare it side by side with this chapter Leviticus it is almost as if the details simply repeat themselves. In Luke 2 you will read about the allegedly immaculately conceived Virgin Mary. The reality is that she was born in sin, even as we are. In Verse 22, note that it refers to the time for their purification according to the law of Moses. This provision comes from Leviticus 12. The Virgin Mary had to be purified from a time of uncleanness because she, too, was a daughter of Adam and Eve, conceived and born in sin. She went through the process of purification just as the other Israelite daughters of Adam did when they brought a child into the world. At his presentation in the temple in Jerusalem, they offer a sacrifice according to the provisions of this chapter of Leviticus.

The Son of God came into the world to redeem us from our sin. Although he knew no sin, God made him to be sin for us when he bore it in his sufferings and especially on the cross. God did not come down and create a new man from the dust like he did Adam to be our Savior. Instead, the Redeemer came into the world through the process of conception and childbirth, a process that, since the fall, is marked with reminders of our sin, evil, and uncleanness. These were vividly portrayed and reinforced by the ceremonies of the Old Testament. Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit--not by anything in the Virgin Mary herself--, was conceived in her, of her substance. He but filtered out of all sin and corruption. He was the Holy One, yet how did he come into this world? Through the unholy mess of uncleanness. Jesus passed through our uncleanness when he entered into the world.

When he was 8 days old, he was circumcised. How can Jesus be circumcised? John the Baptist wonders how he needs to be baptized by Jesus when he comes to him. We need the circumcision of Christ's cross. And why was he circumcised? Not because he had sin from which he needed to be redeemed, but because he took that vicariously since he would bear the reproach and sin of his people. He who is perfectly clean and holy passes into this world through our uncleanness. He who needs no sacrifice has a sacrifice offered. Not to atone for his sins, but to point to his future death and suffering for us.

The details are complicated, but the basic point is simple. Jesus was perfectly clean, but we are unclean. Jesus vicariously bears the filth of our sin that he might give us his perfect righteousness. One day his work will be complete when we are reborn in the resurrection. Our first birth is from the flesh, from which we can accomplish nothing but sin. Our second birth is from the Spirit, over which sin has no power.

Let us then walk in this Spirit, and may he complete his work in us. Indeed, as the Scripture says:

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

#13 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 13

For individuals who are concerned about their appearance, there is perhaps nothing more important than the health and appearance of their skin. There is a good reason the makeup industry is a multi-billion dollar industry. If you go into a mall or a big department store, you'll often find the makeup section right in the middle. While wearing nice clothes can help you look good, putting on some makeup can really enhance your appearance. With the rise of 4k HD TV, both women and men in show business or news anchors on TV often wear large amounts of makeup.

Now, don't misunderstand me - I'm not saying that wearing makeup means you are self-conscious about your appearance, nor am I saying that the Bible condemns the use of cosmetics (see the Song of Solomon for a celebration of physical human beauty in marriage). God created us with both spiritual and physical attributes, including inner and outer beauty. While the Bible emphasizes inner beauty (1 Sam. 16:7), it does not negate one's external appearance.

Leviticus chapter 13 contains a long list of rules and regulations regarding skin, which is something visible on the outside of a person. This chapter delves into technical medical details for diagnosing skin conditions as to whether one was ceremonially clean or unclean. When we see how the passage points us to deeper spiritual principles, we can see how God is giving us a "Theological Dermatology" in the passage.

First, let us consider why God chose skin conditions to be such a clear marker of ceremonial uncleanness. Note what God has been doing with these various regulations in the previous chapters. We have dealt with theological zoology, in which the entire created order of creatures becomes a visible canvas upon which God paints a picture of the spiritual distinction between cleanness and uncleanness. Leviticus 12 includes regulations about purification after childbirth, which affect women and their families. These regulations are built into the basic cycle of human life, as times of cleanness and uncleanness are part of ordinary life.

In Leviticus Chapter 13, the focus is on what is visibly apparent in human interactions - the skin. Skin is what people see when they interact with each other, and it becomes the canvas for determining ceremonial cleanliness. While humans are made up of bones, organs, muscles, tendons, tissues, and water, 99% of what we see is skin. The emphasis on the skin in Leviticus represents a visual representation of spiritual principles. Leprosy is not a pretty disease and represents ugliness, reminding us that sin within our hearts is revolting and something to turn away from.

Here the Lord makes the appearance of the skin the means of determining cleanliness. He is using that which is seen to help us understand what is unseen. The Lord is teaching us that purity and righteousness are beautiful things that we desire, while the disease of sin within our hearts is repulsive.

But note that God does not allow us to think simplistically in applying these things. God utilizes distinctions to help us discern cleanness from uncleanness. God could have said that any and all skin imperfections would render one unclean. Some Jews in Jesus' day did this with food and meat. Because of the risk of unintentional contamination, they decided to only eat vegetables. Instead, God taught them to be discerning and made provisions to distinguish a "normal" skin issue from a more serious one. We won't get into all the specific details that were to guide the priest in making this judgment. These formal provisions are fulfilled in Christ and have passed away. But the principle is the same. We must use discernment in determining what activities or engagements might defile us and what might be permissible. Paul reminds us that the earth is the Lord and the fullness thereof. Everything in this world is tainted to some degree with sin and could defile us. But we cannot remove ourselves from the world. We must interact in love with non-believers in necessary matters related to the things of this life in our work and other matters. We will work for and with non-believers, go to them to get our cars fixed or to have our health tended to. We will hear music written by non-believers that reflects their image-bearing nature, but without glorifying God and sometimes celebrating evil. We must learn in all our interactions how to accept the good and reject what is evil. We cannot thoughtlessly engage with the world thinking that everything is just fine. But we also cannot simplistically remove ourselves from it. We must use godly discernment to walk the line between sin and righteousness. This can be a difficult task. Thankfully

just as God gave the priests of old to be experts in discerning these matters, so he has blessed his church with pastors and elders to guide the people.

Finally, we need to consider the provision that this passage offers for moving from a state of uncleanness to cleanness. While reading about the potential problems that can occur on human skin, the emphasis seems entirely negative. The passage repeatedly states that if there is even a suspicion of an unclean disease, the individual must be quarantined for seven days and examined again. If it is indeed leprosy, the individual is declared unclean and must live alone outside the camp, cut off from their family and loved ones. In some cases, leprosy colonies were created where people with leprosy would live together, creating their own underground communities, which were not a pleasant or healthy place to live. However, we should not forget the gracious provision, which is interwoven throughout the whole passage, by which the priest's declaration can make the unclean person clean.

To make an unclean person clean, there are a few things that must occur. Firstly, there is a seven-day waiting period, representing a full cycle of time, after which they can be declared clean. Additionally, certain ceremonial washings are required, such as washing clothes and skin, to remove any potential contamination. While this may seem like a hassle, it is a wonderful provision of God that, although there may be a period of time where someone is declared unclean, that can come to an end through the washing of water. Finally, in some cases, the purification process involves burning clothes or other contaminated items with fire until all contamination is eradicated and the period of cleanness is restored.

It is important to note that there is a spiritual reality reflected here, as the seven-day waiting period represents the time we wait for God's Sabbath rest from our sins, and the washing of our sins by the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the burning with fire throughout the Bible symbolizes God's power as a refining fire that purifies us. Thus, while the emphasis of the passage may be negative, it is ultimately a provision of God's grace, showing His compassion for those who are suffering from physical disfigurement, pain, and isolation from their community and God Himself.

When we think about the New Testament and some of the things Jesus did, the love and compassion of Christ become even clearer. At the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, there is a wonderful story of what Jesus did for a leper that illustrates this. In Mark, chapter one, verse 40, as Jesus was going throughout the synagogues and teaching, preaching the gospel, and casting out demons, a leper came to him and implored him, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." The leper didn't just want to be healed of his skin disease; he wanted to be clean before God, able to go into His presence and worship Him. Jesus was moved with pity and compassion, and he stretched out his hand and touched the leper and said, "I am willing, be clean." Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. Note the compassion and mercy of Jesus that he showed to the leper, looking at him in his miserable condition and having pity on him. In the Old Testament, the priest examined and made sure that lepers had healed on their own before declaring them clean, but Jesus touched the leper and declared him clean by the power of his word. Jesus then instructed the leper to go show himself to the priest and offer for his cleansing what Moses commanded for proof. This act signaled that the one priest who could truly make them clean had come.

But where did the leprosy go? In Matthew 8 (the parallel gospel passage that contains this story) it says, "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the Prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.'" When Jesus touched the leper, even as he had already touched him in his humanity by becoming a true human being in his birth, he took from him his uncleanness and put his cleanness in its place. Jesus

legally bore our uncleanness and the filth of our sins. In this sense, all our uncleanness, not just of the skin but of the heart, Jesus took to himself, legally bearing it but not becoming a sinner. Through his purifying blood, we are cleansed and granted entrance not just into an earthly temple but into the Heavenly Temple to worship. Jesus took our sin, imputed to him, and credited to us his righteousness, as visually portrayed here in Leviticus 13. In this way, the story of the leper is not just about healing from a skin disease but is about the deeper cleansing that Jesus offers to our hearts and souls.

#14 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 14

In many ways, what we read here is a repetition of much of what we have heard in previous chapters. Although the details get a bit complicated, the basic point is quite simple: sin makes us dirty, but God can make us clean.

As we look at this section, we will use a particular theological lens to help us focus our attention. This lens comes from the way our Confession of Faith describes the difference between the Old and New Testaments in the way God administers His grace. While the substance, heart, and core of both testaments proclaim the same thing - cleansing of sin through the blood of Christ and faith in Him - the outward way God administers it to the OT people is different from the NT. The OT and the NT are the same in substance but differ in mode of administration. The medicine is the same (faith in the grace of Christ), but the outward way we receive it differs.

In the New Testament grace is dispensed through the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. While they are fewer in number and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, they are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles.

After reading Leviticus 13 -14, we see why this point is here. Today, there are two key things at the heart and core of what we do when we come to church. The first and foremost is the preaching of the word, which is the center of everything we do. Then there are the sacraments, and we only have two - baptism and the Lord's Supper. These provisions are quite simple. But if we compare them to Leviticus 14, where all the sacramental provisions are described in detail, it gets quite complicated.

On the one hand, these complicated provisions were a reminder that Israel was still a "church under age," and the relative burden they placed upon the Israelites was a reminder that Christ had not yet come. On the other hand, we can also see hidden mercies intermixed in these provisions on the earthly and the heavenly levels to keep them on the path of faith in Christ.

If someone today had a skin disease or another physical ailment, our first reaction would be to provide medical attention and support to them. However, when we read Leviticus chapter 14, we don't initially see that kind of compassionate response. Instead, it seems as if the person with the disease is burdened with regulations to follow to be back with God's people. They have to stay separated for at least seven days and then be examined by a priest before they can rejoin the community. There's almost a sense of public humiliation involved, and the regulations can seem tedious and overwhelming.

But we need to remember that in the Old Testament, Israel was like a child, and God gave them special rules to guide and help them. Paul in Galatians chapter 4 likens Israel to a child who hasn't reached maturity as a nation. And just as we give children special, strict rules to guide them, God gave Israel specific regulations. Though it may seem burdensome, it was ultimately for their good.

Additionally, we need to keep in mind that medical science was not advanced during this time, and people didn't understand how diseases were spread. It wasn't until about 150 years ago that germs were discovered. In the Civil War and World War I, there were no disinfectants, and medical treatments were often ineffective. God gave the Israelites these strict regulations to protect them from disease, even if they didn't understand the scientific reasoning behind them. So, while the regulations may seem burdensome, they were ultimately an act of mercy from God.

Let's first look at the earthly mercies intermixed here. The command to separate the leper from the people for seven days might seem harsh at first. Nobody is allowed to be with them, help them or comfort them. However, God was quarantining the disease to minimize the possibility of others getting infected. This may seem like a burden, but there's a mercy hidden beneath it. Through the burden placed on the diseased individual, mercy is shown to the community in that the disease is prevented from spreading.

The first section from verses 1-32 explains the same provision for the cleansing of leprosy. The priest is to take two live birds, kill one of them, dip the live bird with the cedar wood and the scarlet yarn into the blood, and use the bird to sprinkle the people with the blood. The bird is set free to symbolically carry away the uncleanness. The blood of death cleanses from sin because it takes the sin. Therefore, the bird carries the blood and uncleanness away from the camp for cleansing. Along with the sin offering, regular-income folks are to give the more expensive offering. But if they are poor and unable to do so, then they can take less valuable animals and make the offering. This emphasizes how God's mercy is intermixed with the burden, allowing those who don't have much to give in proportion to what they have. The diseased person must cut off all their hair according to verse 9. It ensures that medically speaking, the disease will not come back. Although it is a burden and not fun to deal with, it is a requirement that ensures the well-being and health of the person and prevents them from communicating the disease again.

Lastly, verses 33-57 provide a provision for determining whether a house is clean. The Hebrew word for leprosy is broad and includes all kinds of diseases like fungus and bacteria, some of which can take root in skin and walls. Although this may seem unusual, it is a provision for the health and well-being of the people. Those who have trouble with mold allergies will certainly understand the mercy of being removed from it!

When we look further at the details of this passage, we see that guilt, offerings, and sin offerings are mentioned, and in them, there is the shedding of blood. It's interesting to understand symbolically that washing with water washes away dirt or disease. We can make sense of that pretty clearly because if our hands get dirty, we go to the sink, get some soap, and wash them. However, it's not easy to understand why blood is used in the cleansing process. Blood doesn't clean stuff; it stains it. But here, blood brings cleansing instead of causing dirtiness and filthiness. Even skin diseases that are neutral are the effect of sin in this world, but they are not themselves sinful. Nobody gets a disease because they have sinned in a specific way. The Lord is showing us that the ultimate thing He's pointing us to here is the disease of sin that we all have and the cleansing we can get, not just from water, but from blood, from death, because that's what our uncleanness and filthiness deserve. We have provisions for sin, the sin offering for specific sins, and the burnt offering, the more general offering for our sinfulness, pointed to here in the cleansing of blood.

Let's consider the following from an earthly perspective: If you go for a run you will come back sweaty and be drenched from head to toe. What do you want? You want to go home and take a long shower. The entire time you are waiting to get there, you are thinking, "I'm filthy. I stink. I have to get this stuff off." Finally, you take that shower and you come out feeling clean. That feeling you have on an earthly level is also what's happening spiritually, symbolized in that ceremonial washing. This ceremony has a direct connection with the sacrament of baptism. Blood legally cleanses and justification takes away the guilt of our sins. Our sanctification gradually and progressively cleanses us from the filth of our sins as they infest and infect our souls.

There are other interesting things involved in this ceremony. For instance, a provision is made with regard to the ordination of priests, and here it is for the congregant in verse 14, which is repeated two other times. It says that the priest shall take the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on his thumb, and on his big toe, on his right foot. This is a symbolic representation of the totality of the person, where the ear hears the word of God, the thumb works with its hands to do the word of God, and the big toe at the bottom with the feet walks in the word of God. We sin with our ears by not hearing, with our hands by transgressing, and with our feet by not walking in His ways. We have cleansing from the guilt of sin with the blood and washing from its filth with the oil. Oil is seen as a cleansing agent in other cultures, and that is what is happening here. It is a total full-body cleansing of body and soul through the blood and the spirit of Jesus Christ. When we look at this passage and appreciate the earthly mercies and the heavenly mercies, even within the relative burdensomeness, perhaps we can appreciate a little better the way Jesus himself announced the coming of his Kingdom.

Do you remember what he said as the great sign that the Kingdom had come? If you go to Luke 7, you will read a little bit about it. The messengers from John the Baptist come after he got thrown in jail and ask Jesus, "Are you the one to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus replies, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." When Jesus came, he didn't just say, "You have leprosy. Well, guess what, in the Levitical codes, you have a provision for cleansing. Go wait a week, go to the priest, do your thing, and hopefully, you'll be cleansed." No, he walked right up to them and declared, "I am willing. Be clean." God's grace came not through a ceremonial provision, relatively burdensome or not, but through the power of his word.

"And where did he send them? To the priest. Not when they were filthy, unclean lepers, but after they were already cleansed and had given an offering of thanks to the Lord as a sign that God's Kingdom had come. And when Jesus came and washed the feet of his disciples, do you remember their response? They said, "Lord, don't just wash my feet, but also my hands and my head." This is reminiscent of the provision in Leviticus where the big toe, thumb, and ear were also to be cleansed. However, Jesus responded, "If I wash your feet, your whole body is clean," pointing to the ultimate fulfillment of Leviticus Chapters 13 and 14 in himself as the greater priest and sacrifice to come, and in the Holy Spirit that he has sent to dwell in our hearts to cleanse us from sin.

Leprosy is highlighted as a disease that can make a person unclean for a reason. It's not just a common cold or flu, but a visible disease that spreads and infects itself, just like our sin. However, Jesus, through his power, can forgive and cleanse us through his word and our faith in it. Through the Holy Spirit, he washes and cleanses us from all our sin.

Although this passage is somewhat tedious in the details, how thankful we ought to be for it. For it points us to our Savior who came to us in our diseased condition and became one of us. Scripture tells us

that he came in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, though he himself had none. He bore our disease and sin upon himself and granted us the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. May his Holy Spirit continue to work in us and give us that sevenfold cleansing of our whole being, spirit, soul, and body, that we may live lives consecrated unto him.

#15 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 15

Well, there are some topics that we are perfectly comfortable discussing in public, such as sports. No one would blink an eye if you tried to break the ice by asking "Hey, did you see the Mariners game the other day?" Similarly, you might talk about a car that you recently bought and enjoy driving. You could say, "Man, I see you got a new car. It's great. It's got a V8 engine, gets good gas mileage, and sounds angry when I drive fast." Everyone sitting together at the restaurant or dinner table could discuss the Mariners or the new car all evening, and nobody would think twice about it.

However, the same cannot be said for topics related to reproductive fluids, both male and female. Few if any would deem those appropriate for public discussion.

You see, there is a reason why God places this uncomfortable subject matter before us in a public manner. Going to a priest for cleansing or participating in ceremonial washings connected with impurities can be quite public and embarrassing. But what is the Lord doing? He is exposing what should be most embarrassing about each one of us - our sinful hearts. Every human being often takes great lengths to hide their sin and keep it private. But in the Gospel, God exposes our sinfulness and uncleanness. He takes off the veil that resides over our hearts for all to see. Some would rather die than repent and face the shame of their sin. In the Gospel, we are exposed that God may cleanse us in the light of Christ's grace.

Let's first summarize the provisions for both men and women as outlined in this text. The text discusses the provisions outlined in Leviticus regarding bodily discharges for men and women. The passage is divided into two main sections, with the first section discussing abnormal bodily discharges for men and the second section discussing reproductive discharges for women. The first section provides general provisions for a seven-day period of uncleanness and a sin offering to be made on the eighth day. The second section provides simpler provisions for a man's emission of semen, including bathing and being unclean until the evening. The text emphasizes that the provisions apply to any kind of discharge that flows uncontrollably from the body.

The text then discusses regulations for women. The rules break down into two subsections, with the first focusing on the normal reproductive cycle of a woman and the second addressing abnormal discharges or flows of blood. During the period of menstrual impurity, there is ceremonial uncleanness upon the woman for seven days. If the abnormal discharge goes on for longer than that, the woman remains unclean until it finishes, and then there will be a period of cleansing. If a man lies with his wife during that time, he too is subject to the seven-day cleansing period. Once it is done, the woman is cleansed of her discharge, counts seven days, and after that, she's clean. She then makes a sin offering and a burnt offering before the priest and atones for her sin before the Lord.

What is the purpose of these regulations? As we saw before, through these regulations, God exposes that which we would like to keep private and that is embarrassing, making it public because that is what He is doing with our sinfulness. However, we must remember that these regulations are not intended to teach us that human reproduction is a necessary evil. Some in the Christian church have viewed sexual

relations and human reproduction this way, as simply being for procreation and not for recreation. This is not the point of these provisions. God created us good and in His own image. He blessed Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and to multiply.

God created human reproduction and everything connected to it before sin was a good thing, blessed by God. The whole process, from beginning to end, has God's blessing and stamp of approval on it. The passage is not teaching us that reproductive desires or actions are inherently sinful.

While the ceremonial washings in the Book of Leviticus no longer apply to us today, the general equity or general principles remind us of how sin has corrupted the entire course of our lives. Sin has affected us and especially in our strongest desires (like sexual desires). Both men and women need cleansing from their impurities. Men and women think about and approach sexuality differently because God created them differently, but we both do so from a standpoint that has been affected by sin. The message of our sinfulness applies equally to men and women, and so God chooses these typical regulations, both for men and for women, to be a constant reminder that we are all born in sin.

Still further, it is important to understand that there was a unique purpose for these special ceremonial provisions in Israel's history. They served as a guard against the temptation to worship as the pagans did, as we see in 1st and 2nd Kings when Israel began to worship idols and engage in perverse sexuality in the worship of foreign gods. This was reflected in temple prostitution, which was at the heart of paganism. The pagans made a god of sexual pleasure, believing it to be the pathway to contact with the divine, but it led to the systematic misuse and abuse of weaker individuals. It is not all that different from what we see in today's world, in which the pursuit of sexual gratification is often made the chief end of human life. The Lord put a special guard and fence around Israel to protect them from this type of worship. For example, in Leviticus, the Lord commanded a time period between sexual activity and worship, and before approaching the Lord at Mount Sinai, the people had to abstain from sexual relations as they were especially tempted to introduce that activity into their worship. Despite these provisions, Israel still engaged in this type of worship even in the presence of God. The Lord's special rules were given to keep Israel pure from perverse sexuality, and in this way, they serve as a reminder of God's mercy towards his people.

The Lord reminds us that we are often tempted and prone to impure thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding human reproduction. However, God has given us a merciful remedy for this in the Gospel. On the one hand, Jesus has blessed marriage and reaffirmed it as a normative creation ordinance. Hebrews 13:4 exhorts us to honor marriage and keep the marriage bed undefiled. Sexual activity outside of marriage is impure and unclean, but within marriage, it is pure, holy, undefiled, and blessed by God both in its enjoyable and fruitful aspects. As a church, we should encourage each other to cultivate this mindset in our marriages.

It's also important for us and our children to understand the distinction between clean and unclean in every aspect of our lives. This distinction is seen throughout the book of Leviticus, from our interactions with the animal kingdom to our bodily discharges. God is reminding us to be careful and remember that which is clean and pure, and that which is impure.

But most importantly, this passage also shows us God's gracious provision to cleanse us from our sins. Even though human reproduction can be an embarrassing process, there is a way to be cleansed through the priestly process and atonement. Similarly, as Christians, we have the promise that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The book of Leviticus

practically deals with the ongoing issue of sin in our lives, despite our justification and forgiveness through the blood of the lamb. There is perhaps nowhere this is more evident than our constant struggle to exercise self-control and put to death the lusts of the flesh. As we confess our sins, God will freely cleanse us, wash us, and forgive us. The promise of the scriptures assures us that we will sin again, but as we confess of sins and repent, God will continue to love us and welcome us into his holy presence.

#16 - Devotional Meditation on Leviticus 16

Every married man needs to remember at least two important dates: his wife's birthday and their anniversary. Remember them and it will go well with you. Forget them at your peril! Every American should remember at least one national holiday. Perhaps the most important national holiday for our country as a whole is colloquially known by the date on which it occurs: the Fourth of July. Officially it is called "Independence Day" since it marks the time our country declared its independence from Britain. Religiously, the two most important holidays are Christmas and Easter. In fact, many Americans only go to church on those days. The reality is, the true religious "holiday" (or "holy day") is every Sunday. In it we celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead, worship him, and observe a holy rest. Whether with regard to our political freedom, our family, or our faith, there are obviously some important dates to remember.

For the Jewish nation in the OT, the most important special day was the Day of Atonement, recorded in this chapter. In it, they remembered God's love for them as a nation. Grace was available to them through the ceremonial system in the regular sacrifices. But God had an even greater plan for them in the future. The Day of Atonement pointed to a time when a final sacrifice would be offered by a perfect priest to once and for all put away sin.

This passage is quite deep in its typology in terms of the ways it points us to Christ.

The first point that we see in this passage is that in Jesus God's presence draws near to us. If we open up the book and look at the first several verses, we see the Lord telling Aaron not to come at any time into the holy place inside the veil before the mercy seat that is on the Ark, so that he may not die. This is because that is the place where God especially promised to be present and to dwell with his people. That's why the place had to be specially atoned for, and why we have a priesthood, sacrifices, a tent of meeting, and a sanctuary - to provide a way for us to draw near to God. It is through the priesthood, offering atonement, sacrifice, blood, and death that we are able to draw near to God and that God draws near to us.

The work of Jesus is the true God pitching his tent on this earth in the form of human flesh. He takes to himself human flesh, so that he might take us, who are flesh, and unite us to God through the Holy Spirit. Blood sacrifice is the means, but fellowship with God's glorious presence is the goal. It is only through Jesus that sinners can draw near to God.

But the second thing that is emphasized here is the need for cleansing and forgiveness of our sins. Sin creates a dual problem for us: it makes us both guilty and filthy. There are two words used in verse 16 elsewhere that reflect this dual problem. It says that Aaron needs to make atonement for the holy place because of the "uncleanness" of the people of Israel and because of their "transgressions", all their sins.

The two terms consider the same subject but from a different angle. "Uncleanness" speaks of our sin insofar as it makes us dirty or corrupt. Transgression looks at it primarily insofar as it is a violation of

God's law. These are the twin problems that sin creates for us. On the one hand, it makes us guilty before God as transgressors of the law. But then, secondly, it makes us in our natures filthy and unclean. There's a double problem we have, and redemption comes to solve both problems. We get the guilt of our sins taken care of by the blood of Jesus, which forgives us. We call this our justification. But then we also need to be cleansed through sin's filth and corrupting power, which is the work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification.

That brings us to a third point. On the Day of Atonement we witness the work of Jesus as our High Priest, who represents us before God. We see this even in the garments that he wears.

Verse four tells us that the priest needs to put on the holy linen coat, the linen undergarment, the linen sash around his waist, and so on. These garments are called the holy garments of finely made linen. They are simple white robes and turbans that make the priest look plain and ordinary. These are not the only clothes that the priest would wear. Earlier in the book of Exodus, we read about the ephod, the headdress, and the breastpiece, which are more ornate and adorned clothing that he would wear on some occasions. However, on this day, the high priest must wear the linen garments.

Why? What does the linen garment signify? Before he makes an offering for the people, the priest has to make an offering and sacrifice for himself. The Book of Hebrews summarizes the work of the priest as one who is appointed to make gifts and sacrifices in the service of God, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. The linen garments make him appear pure and white, with no blemish upon him. The priest is not righteous in himself, but he is appointed to represent the people to God. The linen garments provide him with a covering when he goes in to make that offering for himself. He needs this covering because he, too, is a sinner. But after that, he takes off those garments, bathes in water, and puts on the other garments with the names of the people on them. His office is a representative one, and he stands before God as the people's representative.

This reminds us of the work of Christ Jesus, who had no need to offer sin for himself because he was sinless. When he went to the cross, he did not need a linen garment to wear. In fact, they stripped him of his clothing, which symbolically presented to us the fact that this was a sinless priest who had no need to make an offering for himself.

Fourthly, there is the work of the priest as he offers sacrifice. Let's combine points three and four. In verse 11, we read that Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself and make atonement for himself and his house. In verse 15, he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, and sprinkle it over the mercy seat. Aaron has to make atonement for himself first, and then he can make an offering on behalf of the people. It's an offering for the sins of the whole nation and all the people. Aaron has to pray over the goat, put his hand upon it, and confess all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions and sins (verse 21). Through the work of the priest and that prayer, the guilt of the sin of the people is symbolically transferred over to the goat. The people deserve to die for their sins, but the guilt of that sin is transferred over to a substitute through the work of the priest. We know that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins. It was pointing us to something greater, pointing us to Jesus, who, in his capacity as the priest, has the ability to transfer the guilt of our sins to something else, namely to himself.

Some argue that Christ's death is not really an atonement to pay for our sins. In other words, it's not that Jesus died "in our place," but only "for our good." Instead of making a payment he simply provides a

good example. This "theory" dies a quick death when we look at the type and shadow outlined in Leviticus 16.

Here we see Aaron the priest put his hand on the goat, symbolically transferring the guilt to the goat, and confessing over it the transgressions and iniquities of the people of Israel. He then sends the goat away, and the goat carries their iniquities out. If you have a problem with substitutionary atonement in the NT, you also have a problem with the Book of Leviticus. In the OT, we have a shadowy form that reveals with great clarity how God is going to take the guilt and punishment that we deserve and transfer it over to another through the work of his priest.

But then there are the offerings themselves. If you look at verse eight, it tells us that Aaron shall cast lots over two goats. One lot is for the Lord, and the other lot is for Azazel. What does that mean? Well, we know that the goat that falls to the Lord will be used and killed, and its blood will be used to make atonement for the people. The other goat, which is for Azazel, has a different purpose. It's going to be sent away into the wilderness, away from the people. So they have two goats that do two different things.

What's the point of both? Well, first of all, let's recognize that the word "Azazel" is debated among Hebrew scholars, and we could spend hours discussing its meaning. However, it's not necessary to know because the purpose of the Azazel goat is clear in the passage.

If we consider the two goats, the goat that is killed represents the fact that sin deserves death, and without the shedding of blood, there's no forgiveness of sin. That's a basic biblical point that we see clearly in all the sacrifices that involve blood.

But what about the second goat, Azazel? If we look at what happens to it later in the passage in verse 20, we read that the live goat will have the iniquities of the people placed upon it, and it will be sent outside the camp, away from the holy area. This goat represents not only the guilt and filthiness of sin but also its removal from God's presence. We not only have to have blood shed for the guilt of our sins, but we also have to have someone who is separated from God's presence for us. That's what the Azazel goat represents.

And so it was with Jesus. In Hebrews 13, we read that Jesus suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people through his own suffering. He endured separation from God's presence for us on the cross. Our sin makes us guilty, and we need Christ's blood for our forgiveness. Our sin separates us from God, and we need someone who endures that separation for us. Jesus is the offering and person who does both in his death for us.

But there's a final point revealed in this passage. In verse 29, we are told that a special Sabbath rest will occur. This isn't the Saturday Sabbath that Jews observe, but the Sabbath of Sabbaths. The Jews called it a high day because it was important and was supposed to take place on the 10th day of the 7th month. If you look up the Jewish lunar calendar, you'll find this day clearly marked. It's not on a Saturday - it's on the 10th day. It's not a Sabbath per se, but it's a special Sabbath where they make atonement, cleanse themselves from their sins, and rest solemnly. This was also the case with Jesus - he was crucified, and the next day was a day of Sabbath rest. On the third day, he rose from the dead. The Jews were reminded that the ultimate fruit of all priestly work was entering the Sabbath rest that God had appointed for them since the creation of the world.

In the NT, the day of rest and worship switched from Saturday to Sunday as we celebrate Jesus' final sacrifice for sins. In studying the Day of Atonement, we are reminded of our sinfulness and uncleanness before God, and how we ought to afflict ourselves because we are separated from his presence. However, through his infinite grace, he's given us a sacrifice that can cleanse us from sin and free us from the guilt of sin. He's given us one who has suffered separation from God so that we might be able to draw near to him through the veil in the holy place. We can do that now by faith and one day by sight because Jesus, our great high priest, who ever lives to intercede for us, is in that holy of holies in a human body just like us, and he has given us the Holy Spirit so that one day we will all dwell together in the blessed presence of God.

Jesus is our one final great high priest. By his once for all sacrifice at the end of the ages he has forever put away sin. In him, we have a priest who has his office by the power of an indestructible eternal life because he has been raised from the dead. Let us thank the Lord that have this priest who meets our needs, through whom we can draw near to God and worship. May he strengthen us in times of temptation, trial, difficulty, and depression, and may we lift up our hearts to our Savior in love and adoration for his work for us.

#17-A - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 17:1-9

Leviticus was given to God's people to teach us some basic distinctions. Chapter 10:10, you may recall, summarizes them for us. The priests are to teach the people the difference between the holy and the common, and the clean and the unclean. In this passage, it is the distinction between the holy and the common that is most prominent. At first glance, it seems that the passage deals with two very different things. In verses 1-9 the chapter deals with the subject of "sacred space." In other words, it explains the proper location of the sacrifices. They are not to be given in a common area but in a sacred one. In the second part of the passage, Moses outlines the idea of the sacredness of blood. Although these seem to be quite different subjects, they both illustrate the difference between the holy and the common.

To keep these devotionals to a more manageable length, I will only deal with the first section today. We will cover the prohibitions regarding blood tomorrow.

Keep in mind that while the principles apply to us today, their application of them to us differs in the NT. We don't technically have sacred space anymore. Worship is not made more acceptable to God based on the location in which it is offered. We do have "sacred time" in that one day in seven is still set apart as a Sabbath to worship the Lord. Likewise, since Christ has shed his blood fully and finally to put away sin, the regulations regarding blood also do not apply today. But more about this later.

First, let us look at the idea of sacred space as outlined in the first part of the chapter.

Let's examine the first point in 17:1-9, which pertains to the principle of holiness or sacredness as applied to space. In summary, these regulations ensure that offerings and sacrifices are performed in the correct location. This location is the entrance of the tent of meeting. Symbolically, typologically, and theologically, this is significant because the entrance of a house or building is where you gain access. God is sending a clear message that to enter His sacred space, a sacrifice is necessary. This concept is crucial as it depicts the fact that before we can do anything with or for God, there must be a sacrifice, as we are sinners and cannot approach Him based on our own works. Leviticus 1 highlights this point with a bloody sacrifice to commence the entire process, which must be performed at the entrance to the tent of

meeting to signify that there is no entrance to God without blood. Moreover, a prohibition against performing these sacrifices outside the camp or in the open field is also given. The bottom line is that there is a sacred space, and acts of worship, particularly sacrifices, must be performed there. To be sure, both then and now there were acts of worship (such as prayer) that could be performed anywhere. But in the OT even prayer was often directed towards God's sacred space on earth when they positioned themselves towards the direction of the temple in Jerusalem.

Why was this important in the OT times?

Firstly, the text emphasizes that offering the sacrifice at the entrance of the tent of meeting is crucial to ensure that it is offered as a gift to the Lord their God. This point is reiterated throughout the chapter, with verse five stating that the sacrifice should be brought to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting. By doing so, verse four indicates that the sacrifice will be offered as a gift to the Lord. When we worship the Lord privately, offering a sacrifice to God is similar to giving an offering. In today's context, we give money in the form of an offering to the church to support its work.

Some Christians may claim to be Christians but rarely go to church. By privatizing their Christian faith and limiting their religious exercises to just their family, they are depriving God and His church of gifts that could be used to serve others in love. It is important to devote to the Lord what belongs to Him and not restrict it to our family alone.

Therefore, the primary reason for offering the sacrifice at the sacred place is to ensure that it is given over to the Lord as an act of worship.

There's a second reason that has to do with the designated purpose of the space outside the holy place, especially the place outside the camp. This space was already designated to have an important purpose in the worship of God, and sacrificing outside the camp would have disrupted this purpose. In Leviticus 14:7, we see the laws for cleansing leprosy which state that two birds are to be taken, and one of them is to be killed. Then the live bird is to be taken with cedarwood, scarlet yarn, and dipped in the blood of the killed bird. The live bird is then released to fly away into the open field.

The open field is significant because it's the same location identified in Chapter 17. This is where the sins of the people of Israel and their uncleanness were symbolically put upon the animal. The bird flew far away into the open field, symbolizing God's forgiveness and cleansing of His people. It's a beautiful image of God taking away our sins and putting them on a soaring bird that migrates far away from us in every season.

However, if you go to that place of unholiness where the uncleanness symbolically represents your removal from God and begin sacrificing and worshiping, you confuse that which is holy and common. You disrupt the designated purpose of the open field and outside the camp. The place outside the camp was also where Azazel, the scapegoat that carried the sins of the people, was sent.

Therefore, by sacrificing outside the camp, you're disrupting the beautiful picture that God made. God wanted that picture to remain pure and clear because it shows the work of Jesus.

There is a third reason why Israel must only offer sacrifices at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting is that it serves as a help against idolatry. In verse 7, there is a reference to "goat demons," which meant a hairy goat but also referred to a demonic idol in the OT times. In ancient Pagan cultures, people would offer sacrifices to images, sometimes of goats, to seek fertility and growth as an agricultural society. These sacrifices were done in an open field where livestock and goats grazed. God forbids sacrificing to these

idols and makes a rule that sacrifices can only be made in one place. This makes it easier for Israel to resist the temptation to conform to the cultures around them and worship idols.

Although these applications of the idea of sacred space have been fulfilled in Christ, the principle still holds true. Only now it is applied to us cosmically and eschatologically. This means that our hearts are set upon God's true sacred space in heaven. The earthly tabernacle and temple have passed away because Jesus, the Son of God, has passed through the heavens. He has not only approached the entrance to God's tent but has made his way inside and is preparing a place for us. While our bodies live on the earth, our hearts are set in heaven where Jesus is at God's right hand. Let us then set our hearts on things above where he is, and live lives of purity and holiness, cleansing ourselves of the filth of the world as we await his coming.

#17-B - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 17:10-16

But then there's a second part to consider, verses 10 to 16, which deal with the sacredness of blood. This is not the first time this regulation has been mentioned in the Bible or even in Leviticus. It was first introduced during the time of Noah, when God made it clear that the blood of animals should not be consumed. Earlier in Leviticus, similar regulations were mentioned which are reiterated here. Israel was prohibited from consuming the blood of animals. The point is clear - whether someone is out hunting or comes across an animal, they must ensure that the blood is poured out onto the earth. They are not to eat it blood.

The regulation itself is pretty straightforward. But what are the reasons for this?

First, there is the general equity or general principles involved here, although they are not explicitly stated. The fact is, consuming blood is not healthy, especially in large quantities. This is a medical fact that was not understood in the same way in ancient times when medical science was less advanced. Many of the surrounding cultures had their own ideas about medicine, often relying on witch doctors and other non-scientific methods. However, when we read through the laws and regulations in Leviticus, particularly those pertaining to clean and unclean foods, we can see that they align with what we know about scientific and medical knowledge. It makes sense that certain animals are safer to eat than others, and while it's not a hard and fast rule, there are common sense reasons to avoid certain foods, especially if you can't be sure about their cooking temperature.

In modern times, cooking is much easier and safer thanks to tools like meat thermometers. But in ancient Israel, it was much harder to tell which foods were safe to eat and which were not. God gave these laws to protect and preserve His people from disease, aligning with many principles found in modern science. Blood can carry bacteria, and consuming it in large quantities can lead to pathogens in the body. Additionally, blood is high in iron, and overdosing on iron can be harmful to the body. There is clearly a general equity here in the prohibition against eating blood.

However, this is not the main point of the passage. The primary emphasis is on the principle that life is in the blood, which is reiterated several times in the passage. In verse 11, it states, "The life of the flesh is in the blood," and in verse 14, "The life of every creature is its blood." The passage also emphasizes that whoever consumes blood will be cut off. The point being made is that blood is synonymous with life itself.

Some people who dislike the OT or Christianity more generally sometimes suggest that this prohibition is rooted in some kind of magical belief, in which the spiritual power of the soul resides in the blood. However, this is not the meaning of the Bible. Even from a modern scientific standpoint, it is clear why one might say that life is in blood and that blood is life. Blood has a vital role in the body, as it removes waste and transports oxygen and other nutrients throughout the body. Without blood circulation, one would quickly become poisoned and die. We need not resort to pagan magical theories to explain the thought that the life is in the blood. Therefore, blood is regarded as sacred not because of some magical belief, but because of its fundamental role in sustaining life. There is no need to resort to fanciful theories to explain this principle. It is a simple, scientifically understandable truth that highlights the importance of blood and its crucial role in the body. The attempts to discredit the Bible or those who believe in it by painting them as superstitious or foolish are baseless and unfounded.

But the text presses to an even deeper reason why blood was to be considered sacred and not be eaten. This has to do with its unique role in worship for making atonement. There is a principle at work here that life is represented in blood for good sound reasons, not just symbolically or medically. Blood has a specific sacred purpose before God. In verse 11, it is stated that the blood of creatures is not only their life, but it is also given to make atonement for one's soul. The shedding of blood during an animal's death represents the life that was once in it.

This blood is to be used for a specific and holy purpose - atonement - and nothing else. It is not to be consumed but used solely for making atonement before God. This principle is similar to the idea that there is a space dedicated to God's holiness for worship and nothing else. The centrality of blood in approaching God and worship is significant, and Israel must approach God through atoning sacrifices using blood. If the blood is not going to be used for that purpose, it should be poured out on the ground, covered, buried, and gotten rid of.

Now, what about today? Does that mean if anyone eats a piece of meat with some red stuff, they violate this regulation? No, it doesn't. In fact, the red stuff in meat is usually not blood. It's called myoglobin, which has the color of blood because of the iron in it that turns red when exposed to oxygen. Even if you accidentally consume a small amount of blood, it won't hurt you. The regulation is symbolic and not enforced anymore since Jesus fulfilled it. Jesus had to be the perfect, spotless Lamb of God as predicted by the prophets in the Old Testament. He shed his blood outside the camp, in the sacred place appointed by God, and that blood represented his life poured out for us. His blood makes atonement, and through it, we become clean.

We can think of Christ's redemption as him taking our condemnation and us getting his righteousness legally speaking, but we can also think of it as the substitution of death for life. Jesus, who had life in him, took our death, and through his blood applied to us, we receive his life. The result of that is washing with his blood, which makes us clean (vs. 15). Jesus, through his work, has brought all these things to fulfillment, bringing us to the one remaining sacred place in heaven where he is, and where God's sanctuary is.

He has done that through his blood, which is the life, taking our death and giving us his eternal life. The result of all of that is that he has taken away our idolatry, our worship of the ordinary and earthly, and he has cleansed us from all unrighteousness, so that we might stand before him pure and holy in heaven. These regulations may seem odd to us from a different time and culture, but they do point us to Jesus, our Redeemer, who shed his blood for our sins.

On this Good Friday, let us especially be thankful for the sacred blood of Jesus Christ. He sacrificed himself once for all at the end of the ages to fully and finally deal with our sin. In him was life, but in us is death. Through his shed blood, he takes our death and replaces it with the life that is eternally in him. He who believes passes from death to life, cleansed from the corruption of evil within us. There is no approaching God without blood. Thanks be to God for the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without spot or blemish.

#18 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 18

Leviticus is filled with types and shadows of the work of Christ as our final priest and sacrifice. But there is another side of redemption revealed in this book. We learn not only what Christ will be for us but also how Christ is to be manifested in us. The laws we have been reading about cleanliness and purity are thus a double-edged sword of salvation. On the one hand, they reveal what God is doing in us through the Holy Spirit to wash and cleanse us from the filth of our sins. On the other hand, they demonstrate our response to God, how we should live our lives in purity and cleanliness, based on what He has done for us.

In Leviticus 18, the commandment to live a life of purity and holiness hits us firmly, particularly in the area of human sexuality. The NT no less than the OT also emphasizes that the Christian life is one of purity in sexual desire and activity. This area of life is a great test to measure how we are doing in walking in purity and holiness, whether in our personal individual life or in relation to the culture around us. Therefore, Leviticus devotes an entire chapter to what human sexuality looks like, both in an unclean way and in a clean and God-honoring way.

As we meditate on the chapter, let's first consider the reasons God give Israel (and us!) such clear and pointed commandments regarding human sexuality. Secondly, we will look at the commandments themselves and their specific prohibitions.

Reasons God Gives These Commandments

Let's consider the first point: why does God give these prohibitions and why does he make this topic such a big deal, dedicating a whole chapter to it? There are two ways to approach this: we can examine it in a general sense as it applies to all humans, or we can look more directly at why it would be important for Israel. Let's start with the first one.

The first reason, which I hope is obvious, is that throughout history, humans in their depravity have been inclined toward sexual perversion. The literature and artwork of the Ancients attest to this fact. Paul addresses this with crystal clarity in Romans 1, outlining the downward spiral of man's rejection of God, to sexual promiscuity and fornication, and eventually to homosexual desires and activities. It's like a domino effect that happens very quickly, with idolatry leading to sexual perversion that is an abomination to God and receives in itself the due penalty for its perversion.

This situation has not improved with time. We are currently living in a revival of ancient paganism in this regard. It is not just that the gratification of sexual desire has been made man's chief and highest end. Sexuality has become the deepest and most fundamental aspect of human identity, especially in its most twisted and perverse forms. We can and should trace the intellectual and cultural origins of this modern-day disaster in order to better navigate the confusion. Biblically speaking they find their roots in the depravity and lust that lies deep within the heart of sinful man. God gives us these regulations to put a

hedge and fence around our sinful tendencies. While the world become increasingly grotesque and unrestrained in this regard, God's law serves to restrain the remnants of depravity within us to keep us within the pure path of God's kingdom.

Second, throughout human history, mankind has not only been inclined towards sexual perversity but has also made it a religious pursuit, mixing sexuality with religious worship. Note how Moses frames the beginning and end of this chapter, emphasizing Israel's relationship with the surrounding nations in this regard. In verse 3, he warns them not to follow the sexual practices of Egypt and Canaan, where the people mixed sexuality with their religious worship. At the end of the chapter, he again references this point, noting that if the Israelites corrupt themselves in this way they will be vomited out of the land just like the pagan nations who came before them.

Human sexuality is a good thing as it was created by God. It is to be enjoyed by one man and one woman in a lifelong marriage union and bears fruit for God's kingdom in a covenant seed. Outside of marriage it is the fruit of idolatry and itself becomes one of man's chief idols. It is not hard to see how sexual depravity with its self-destructive pursuit of a constant state of physical euphoria can so quickly become connected to even formal religious worship. The same is true with drug use and its pursuit of a "high" to escape the miseries of this sinful world. The irony is that it delivers only decreasing levels of enjoyment which are fleeting. The short-term sinful pleasure leaves the "worshipper" with a long-term sense of guilt and shame. This becomes a downward spiral of bondage and death.

Sexual temptation moves very quickly into that which God created in us, something to be enjoyed and celebrated in the context of marriage. Instead, it becomes an idolatrous pursuit. The ancients openly acknowledged it as a religious pursuit, creating gods, temples and serving them with formal religious devotion. Interestingly, we see the same pattern in modern man. They aggressively promote their worldview and practices with a religious zeal that is greater than those who profess traditional world religions. Moreover, they have adopted a kind of religious symbolism (the rainbow pride flag), a sacred time period or set of "holy days" (pride month), as well as a kind of church discipline for the condemnation and ex-communication of the "heretic" from society (i.e., the cancellation of persons in the public/virtual arena). They also have a kind of "conversion experience" shared by those who "come out" into these perverse lifestyles. Idolatry and sexual perversion are modern realities just as much as they are ancient ones.

The Prohibitions Themselves

We now turn to the prohibitions themselves. Most of these are fairly straightforward. But since God outlines them in detail, we need to remind ourselves of his revealed will on this subject.

First, there are several prohibitions intended to prevent incestuous relationships. The phrase "uncovering the nakedness" refers to sexual relations, which are prohibited with close relatives, including mothers, stepmothers, sisters, grandchildren, step-sisters, aunts, and daughters-in-law or sisters-in-law. God repeats these prohibitions throughout the passage to ensure that God's people that incest is a depraved act that violates the sanctity of family relationships. As perverse as our culture has become, thankfully this is a point about which even pagans rarely disagree.

Secondly, in verse 19 we find a regulation pertaining to a woman's menstrual cycle and her ceremonial uncleanness during that time. What is important to note here is that this regulation was specific to Old Testament times, when a woman's menstrual period made her ceremonially unclean. However, with the

coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, this commandment has been fulfilled and is no longer applicable to us. There is obviously some general equity connected to the prohibition, but insofar as it is connected to the ceremonial system it has passed away.

Thirdly, we see in verse 20 that adultery or fornication is prohibited. The passage states that one should not engage in sexual intercourse with their neighbor's wife and defile themselves. This differs from the more obvious prohibition against marriage or sexual relations with close relatives. However, the underlying principle remains the same. Just as close relatives are considered part of one's own flesh and blood, a man's wife is united to him in a sacred relationship that should not be violated. This relationship is unique and special and should be honored and kept wholly. Engaging in sexual activity with another man's wife not only makes one ceremonially unclean but also morally unclean before God. God created marriage in the beginning for one man and one woman. They are to be the sole objects of one another's sexual desire. Any other sexual relationship or affection is considered impure and dirty.

It is interesting to note how the world describes these things in the opposite way. Movies, literature, and stories of the world often portray adulterous relationships as tragic love stories between two unhappy people who are unable to be together. The marriage relationship is considered unhappy and thus impure. The adulterous affair is considered the pure desire of their hearts. They do not describe it for what it is, which is uncleanness and filth. Instead, we must view it as a pit of filth and mud that would defile us in the presence of God.

Fourthly, we have a prohibition against offering children in fires to Molech in verse 21. This refers to the horrific practice of child sacrifice that was part of the Canaanite culture to appease their gods. Unfortunately, this practice was not unique to the Canaanites, and many other pagan cultures also did the same. While there are plenty of arguments to be made against Western colonialism, it is important to acknowledge the disturbing practices of some of the cultures that were colonized, including child sacrifice, which is still prevalent in some cultures today. Ultimately, it is the Gospel that is necessary for all cultures to overcome such sinful practices.

Some people may use this prohibition against child sacrifice to dismiss other provisions, such as the next one dealing with homosexuality, as irrelevant for today. However, we must remember that children are the fruit of sexual relations that God promises to bless within marriage. This horrific prohibition against child sacrifice is central to this passage, and Israel began doing this practice right before they were expelled from the land. Sadly, this practice still continues today with the legal protection of abortion, as many offer their children to the gods of convenience and ease of life without any hesitation. The underlying principle is the same for both ancient and modern paganism: sexual depravity leads to attempts to completely disconnect such activity from its fruit in the bearing of children. Rather than a means to procreate, human sexuality is abstracted from its God-ordained purpose in the pursuit of idolatry.

Fifth, verse 22 of the text addresses the prohibition against homosexual relations: "You shall not lie with a male, as with a woman. It is an abomination." The Bible is very clear that homosexual activity is a sin and an abomination against the Lord. This applies both in the Old and New Testament, and those who engage in such activity are excluded from the Kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, it is stated that the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, and men who practice homosexuality, among others, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Heterosexual fornication or adultery is also a sin that keeps you out of the Kingdom if you do not repent. The Bible doesn't exclusively call out homosexuality or give a "pass" to heterosexual sin.

It is not just the activity but also the orientation of homosexuality that is condemned as a sin by God. The Bible tells us that homosexual violations and desires are more heinous sins on the scale of heinousness in terms of a violation of God's law. In Romans 1 Paul starts with idolatry, moves to heterosexual promiscuity, and finally to homosexual activity. God condemns the action as well as the perversity of the heart and the desire that comes from it.

The defense of homosexuality often vacillates on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, some appeal to free choice in defense of our "human right" to marry whomever we wish. Others appeal to nature or even God himself, asserting that God created them with these desires and they cannot help themselves. These two arguments are not consistent with one another. The biblical position argues that we are all born with corrupt, sinful natures filled with all manner of unnatural lusts. Our wills are in bondage. While we are technically "free" we are only able to sin.

The Bible is clear that this is not how God created us. They are the result of the fall of man in which we share personal responsibility. We are all born sinners and inclined to evil, but we must resist these urges and desires. Interestingly, a recent study funded by various groups went out looking for a "gay gene," but they only found a set of genetic features that are loosely held in common among those who identify as homosexual. However, they were quick to add that these features are also found among those who engage in risky behaviors like dangerous drug use.

As a church, we must be clear and not waver on the fact that homosexual activity and orientation are both condemned by God as sins. We cannot cut preachers or ministers of the gospel slack on this issue. They are called to be clear, definitive, and pointed in what they say from the scripture. Both homosexual activity and the homosexual orientation or desire of the heart are condemned as an abomination before the Lord. No one who claims to be a Christian can say that this is the way God made them. It is the height of arrogance before God to assert such things.

Both the OT and NT clearly condemn all these forms of sexual depravity in terms that are crystal clear. God's word reveals the utter heinousness of our sins, whether it's greed, adultery, homosexuality, coveting, or any other sin--it reveals it, points it out, and condemns it in the strongest terms. However, that is not where the church ends in its proclamation of the Gospel to sinners. It must state this clearly as Paul does, but with him we must also go on to say, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). Isn't that amazing? When you look at what Leviticus 18 says about violations of these commandments against sexual uncleanness or sacrificing children in the fires of Moloch, God holds out mercy and grace for those who would simply acknowledge that they have committed such things, repent of them, and turn to Him. God forgives and cleanses them. He did that in the Old Testament with the wicked kings who did those very things, and in Corinth, the perverse city where Paul proclaimed the gospel. He also does it today.

It is often said that Christianity and Christians who believe these things somehow hate others. However, there is nothing hateful about pointing out to somebody who may be walking down I-5 in heavy traffic that they might get hit by a van or by a semi. If you saw someone walking down the freeway, you'd say, "Get out of there. You're going to die!" You're not hating the man; you're loving him. By accepting sinners in their sin and allowing them to stay there is actually shows hate toward them. What love do we show our neighbor by leaving him in a situation that could lead to his death? But showing them the filthiness, odiousness, and danger of their sin, and showing them the one way of escape, which is

through the washing and justifying that comes in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God, shows love.

None of us are free from the impure corruption of the lusts of our hearts. May God fill us with his purity and renew us in his image so that we may walk in the holiness that befits the children of God.

#19 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 19

So far Leviticus has been characterized largely by its orderliness. The chapters themselves are very clearly organized, with distinct provisions for each section. This reflects the holiness and orderliness of God himself. However, when we come to Leviticus 19, it appears as if Moses has fired a spiritual shotgun. In a first reading, it seems that all we have here are miscellaneous commandments that are seemingly random. But there is, in fact, an organizing principle to all of the commandments, which Moses has given to us as a quick spread to see the common thread that ties them all together. The main point of the passage is found in verse 2, where the Lord God says to the people of Israel, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.' These ethical and moral regulations express the holiness of God, and the Israelites were to reflect that in their everyday lives. Being holy means being set apart and distinct, which is what God has done for his people. Because of this, they were to live holy lives as an expression of their belonging to the Lord, who has saved and loved them.

As we go through the seemingly random sections of commandments in this chapter, we need to see how each one reflects and is rooted in the fact that God is holy, and we are to live holy lives in him.

How does the passage demonstrate this? It begins with the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother." There is no relationship quite like the one between a child and their parents. It is special and holy. To fail to honor our parents is not only to disobey them, but it is also to violate the sacredness of the bond we have with them. God gives various spheres of our life degrees of authority. But the authority of the government or a boss is not the same as the authority of a parent. This means, by extension, that the entire family structure is also sacred and holy. For siblings and spouses to sin against one another also profanes the holy name of God. Violating the commandment to honor our father and mother is not merely breaking a rule, but contradicting the very principle of holiness that is in God himself.

He then quickly moves backward in the Decalogue to the fourth commandment: "You shall keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God." The Sabbath is not just a matter of "dos" and "don'ts." It illustrates the fundamental principle of "holiness" as applied to time. We don't simply rest for rest's sake as if we were to be idle. Instead, we should devote ourselves to worship because that is the holiness of it. Beneath the commandments is the idea of the holiness of God as that is reflected in our life pattern as image bearers.

Likewise, on that day when God is worshipped, how are we to do it well? That's the next verse: "Do not turn to idols or make for yourself any gods of cast metal. I am the Lord your God." The worship on that day is holy and should only be done as God commands. This is the key principle of worship - what is not commanded is forbidden. If God doesn't tell you to do it in worship, then you shouldn't do it. This is then illustrated in a regulation about the peace offering. The peace offering represented the fellowship that we have with God, so it was like a celebratory meal where we could enjoy the fact that we were friends. You can eat that sacrifice on the day you offer it or the day after, but not on the third day. If a man does

this, it says he has "profaned what is holy to the Lord. Do you see the pattern that's developing here? The principle of holiness underlies Moses's exposition of all these commandments.

The idea is that our lives as Christians, when we walk in sanctification, are also to be governed by this fundamental principle. We are to live differently in our moral lives and especially in our worship. We regard things as sacred and approach them the way God wants us to and not just the way we want.

In verse 9 we are reminded of the general command to "Love your neighbor as yourself." This principle is related to holiness because. Your neighbors are creatures made in God's image and are thus set apart from the rest of creation. If they are Christians they are your spiritual brethren with whom you are in covenant fellowship. Our neighbors are thus different and set apart from other creatures. If they are your brothers and sisters in the Lord, they are the holy saints of God, and you must think of them and regard them in light of that and deal with them in all your dealings out of that spiritual identity.

The specific example given in verse 9 has to do with harvesting and gleaning. Essentially, it says not to harvest the whole field but leave some on the edges for the poor and sojourner. The idea is that our business activity is not just about squeezing out every last bit of profit we can for ourselves, but out of our abundance being prepared to share with those in need. Those who are around us, our brothers and sisters, are holy in the sense they belong to God, and God's love is to be expressed to them. As he is holy, we are to be holy.

The next section, verses 11 and 13, deals with truth and honesty, especially in regard to our business dealings. When we engage in business we are dealing with implicit or explicitly contractual arrangements. Promises are made regarding work performed and payment made. Our word is sacred. It must be honored. As God's holy word is inviolable and true, so must we be truthful and faithful in our commitments to one another. We must be holy as God is holy.

In verse 17, the principle applies to all our personal interactions with our brothers. The verse instructs us not to hate our brother in our hearts but instead to reason frankly with our neighbor, lest we incur sin because of them. When we have a conflict, it is often difficult to talk about it. The Bible advises us to bear with and love the person if we can interact with them as if nothing had happened. But if we cannot do that, we need to follow Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18, which also come from Leviticus. If we fail to address the issue, the wound festers and leads to bitterness and hatred in our hearts, which is sinful. We may even bear a grudge against our own people and seek vengeance. This goes against the principle of holiness, as we are all God's people. Therefore, we must reason frankly with our brother or sister, explain the problem, and help them to see the fault. We do this not to seek vengeance but because we are concerned about them as a brother or sister in God's covenant family. The relationships we have with our fellow believers are sacred and must affect the way we live and interact with one another. To fail to resolve conflicts in a godly fashion is to dishonor the sacred bond we have as brethren in the Lord. It is also to give into the sin of bitterness, which leads to anger, hatred, and a desire for vengeance. These things only further dishonor the Holy God who made us fellow saints in Christ.

As we go through the rest of the passage, we will see many of the same things. We will see regulations about two kinds of seeds, cloth made of different kinds of garments, trees and fruit, and how many years they need to be kept without being picked. At first, these may seem like strange laws. For example, is Moses really saying you can't breed two kinds of cattle? It's the principle of holiness, visually and ceremonially illustrated in those regulations. As part of the ceremonial system of types, the form as passed away. But the underlying principle remains. Things must be distinct, set apart, and holy. Even

when we come to verse 20 and read about a man lying sexually with a slave woman, there's a distinction made. But the passage still makes it clear that the activity is a sin because marriage is holy, and pure sexual activity between a husband and wife is blessed and celebrated by God. To have sexual relations outside of that context is impurity and unholiness. The core principle here is that even in that area of human interaction, the principle of holiness reigns.

We also see regulations that distinctly set apart Israel's lifestyle publicly and in worship from paganism. This section clearly sets off the practices of Israel in its life and public interactions with those of the pagan cultures around them. For instance, there's a regulation about not eating new flesh with blood because the blood is holy and is used in worship to make atonement. But that's not what the pagans did; they ate freely the blood of the animals, sometimes even in their worship services. Likewise, the passage mentions interpreting omens or telling fortunes, which refers to fortune tellers and those who think they can communicate with the dead or demons. God's revelation is holy, and we are not to mix it with such practices.

Then there's a reference to rounding off the hair on your temples, barring the edges of the beard, cutting your body, or tattooing. We need to take it all together; it's a principle of paganism to deform the body. The body is holy, and it is to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, not a place to picture and invite that which is demonic.

The chapter ends with references to Sabbath, respecting the aged, and honoring father and mother. We honor the aged because they deserve our respect. We respect them because of their experiences and wisdom, and we honor them because they have come before us and paved the way for our lives.

God's commandments in these matters are all rooted in the principle of holiness. We live our Christian life in a way that reflects reality. This means that our ultimate identity is found in the spiritual realities we have come to possess in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has sent us a Spirit whose name is "Holy," and he himself is the thrice Holy Lord God Almighty. Let us then walk in a manner that befits those who are set apart to the Lord, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

#20 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 20

The last passage in Leviticus highlighted the principle of holiness as the ground and basis of our Christian lives. We are to live holy lives because God himself is holy. God's holiness is our starting in Christ, both for our intellectual and moral lives. The chapter shifts its focus to the end or outcome of our relationship to God in his holiness. In particular, it gives a stark warning that the inevitable end of sin is destruction and death. This biblical teaching is perhaps most vividly articulated by the apostle Paul in Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death." This chapter makes the same point through a phrase that punctuates the entire passage: "...the one who commits these sins shall surely be put to death."

Although Christians are freed from this punishment in Christ, there are good reasons for us to be reminded of it. For one thing, it reminds us of what Christ has done to save us. He had to die for us. On the cross, he bore the guilt and punishment for our sins resulting in our justification and forgiveness. As we think more clearly about this reality we come to a deeper appreciation for Christ's work in our place. But it also helps us in our sanctification. The old man within had to be put to death. This occurs through union with Christ's cross and victorious resurrection. Likewise in moments of temptation, the devil lures us with the temporary pleasures that sin offers us. But this passage is a stark reminder that the end of all sin is death. By bringing the end to the forefront of our minds, the declaration serves as a help to us in

times of temptation. Sin may look like a delicious ice cream cone, but when we clearly see the rot, filth, and decay that will ultimately come from it we are less tempted to partake.

There are four things to note in this passage regarding this basic point.

First, we must clarify that the Bible's declaration that every sin deserves death does not mean (either then or today) that every sin deserves a civil death penalty. This is reserved for extremely heinous sins such as murder and is rooted in something more fundamental than the Mosaic theocracy (see the Noahic covenant in Genesis). Many non-Christians misunderstand the Bible on this point. God is the ultimate judge. When he warns us that sin deserves death it is the spiritual death of eternal destruction that is primarily in view. A few Christians, however, do go astray here, arguing that the Mosaic theocracy provides a blueprint for a modern civil government. This is not our position. The civil government bears the sword in order to restrain man's sinfulness, encouraging what is good and deterring us from what is evil. The Bible indicates that it is to focus on issues related to general morality (i.e. preserving and promoting life, deterring theft, promoting truth and faithfulness in legal contracts, etc). The death penalty is primarily reserved for extremely heinous cases such as first-degree murder. In other words, we should not confuse the spiritual and civil uses of the law on this point.

Second, we must note how Moses begins the chapter by addressing sins connected to worship. As a theocracy, the civil punishments connected to false worship are largely temporary provisions. Frankly, I don't think Christians really want our civil leaders regulating religious worship nowadays at all. Think of any of the last several presidents: would you want any of them to be in charge of making laws for how we are to worship God (whether Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, or Joe Biden). However, there are times when the perversity of religious worship may be so heinous it actually begins to transgress basic moral principles. Cult prostitution based on a system of sex slavery along with child sacrifice would be clear examples of this.

But the text also deals with sins connected to mediums, necromancers, and false prophecy was also a severe sin, and those who did so were to be put to death, and cut off from the people. The civil penalties for these things are connected to the theocracy and therefore don't apply today. But the spiritual realities that underly them are still very much relevant today. The scripture is called the word of life, and turning to other ways of obtaining revelation cuts people off from the only way to life, which is through God's revelation. To abandon God's revelatory word is to abandon our only source of life. The wages of sin is clearly death.

Thirdly, in the next section Moses addresses sexual sins. Although he discussed some of these issues in detail in the previous chapter, he repeats them here to emphasize the penalty of sin in death. But why does he juxtapose sins related to worship and sexuality? The two are inherently connected. Illicit sexual practices were a regular part of Pagan worship, and God's people also engaged in them during the Old Testament period. At times, they had temple prostitutes and worshiped idols like Asherah poles, which involved sexual activity. Ancient Pagan religions often deified the feminine form in a sexualized way, creating idols that highlighted such practices, believing that they would increase fertility. Illicit sexual practices are ultimately the fruit of an idolatrous heart (see Romans 1:18-25). That is why they have been a part of Pagan worship throughout history. The pleasure sexual activity provides can make people feel they have a pathway to the divine. God made sex a powerful thing, and it is meant to be enjoyed within marriage to have blessing and fruitfulness. The Song of Solomon celebrates sexual desire and activity within marriage. But outside of marriage, sex is not a blessing or a source of life. Instead, it is idolatry that leads to death, and this has been the temptation of Israel throughout history, as the

language of whoring after other gods suggest. When we are confronted with sexual temptation and sin, we need to remember what Moses is saying. Sexual temptation promises immediate, intense pleasure that feels real, but we must look beyond it to see the end result: death. The book of Proverbs makes this point quite vividly in several places, connecting the allurements of the adulterous woman to the rotting corpse in a grave. Furthermore, sexual sin is so deceitful and enslaving that one perversion leads to another, and it's never satisfied. The eye never tires of seeing, nor the ear of hearing. Unrestrained sexual lust is also insatiable. As we see in the passage, it moves from adultery to incest to homosexual behavior to bestiality. Such activity is undeniably self-destructive and leads to death.

Fourthly, the text explains how God applies this principle to the theocracy that Israel is experiencing in their daily lives. It speaks in quite vivid terms in this respect: "You shall keep my rules and do them so that the land where I am bringing you may not vomit you out" (Leviticus 20:24). The land is holy and it vomited out the nations that committed detestable things before Israel. God warns that if they follow in their footsteps, it will also vomit them out. God personifies the land and attributes to it a personal characteristic - the ability to vomit out. This is because God dwelt in the land, and it reflects His holiness. The contrast in the language is notable, as the land is described as flowing with milk and honey. Milk and honey taste good. God's land is a sweet land, not just in terms of earthly food, but also because God is there. However, if they practice abominable and detestable acts in the holy land, it is like drinking an old moldy cup of coffee and cream that got left out too long - something they would spit out as quickly as possible. The irony of history is that Israel, who received explicit instruction in this regard, became worse than the pagan nations they replaced. This serves as a reminder of the deceitfulness of sin, and their exile and judgment pointedly reinforce the Biblical teaching that every sin deserves death.

As Christians, we are freed from eternal death in Christ, but it is important to be reminded of this so that we are deterred from sin. If we remain ensnared in sin and do not repent, we show ourselves to have never been true Christians, and we die in our sins. However, along with this warning, God provided a means of cleansing and forgiveness for our continued sins and shortcomings. When we read this chapter, we are reminded of what our sins deserve, why we should run from them, and what Jesus did to cleanse us from them. He lived in a world corrupted by sin, yet He was clean and pure in everything. He lived His whole life in the purity of the worship and life of God, never sinning. As a faithful high priest and the spotless Lamb of God, He provided for our cleansing and forgiveness when we confess our sins to Him. When we look at it this way, Leviticus is essential to understanding the Gospel. Note how these same principles are repeated in the Book of Revelation in its description of the New Jerusalem, which is God's true holy place.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." (Revelation 22:14-15).

Although the circumstances of its application may seem foreign to us from a NT perspective, the basic principle remains true. Every sin deserves death. But Jesus has died to free us from death. Through his blood and Spirit we are washed, justified, and sanctified. Through him we are made fit to dwell with God in the holy temple and holy land above. With that great end in view--which is both certain and sure--let us fight against the corruption of our flesh and the sin that clings so closely to us. Let us not be deceived by its allurements, but clearly expose the filth and rot that hides behind its temporary pleasures. There is no greater battle. We are truly in a fight for our spiritual lives. Thankfully, we have the promise that God will be faithful to his promise to cleanse us for all sin and keep us pure and blameless at his coming.

#21 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 21

Leviticus covers a wide range of topics. We read about sacrifices, laws about skin diseases, uncleanness and reproduction, and clean and unclean animals. Throughout the book, there are also passages about the priests and their duties. In Chapter 21, we return to this theme of the priesthood and its role in Israel. The Levites were set apart as a tribe to minister to the Lord in holy things, although not all of them had the same function. The House of Aaron was where the high priest came from. But the priesthood as a whole embodied the principle of holiness, which is the idea that as God's people, we are set apart and live differently from the world. The Levites were set apart from their brothers, and the priesthood was a type and shadow of the true mediation that is in Christ.

This passage emphasizes the importance of the priesthood's formal exercises and moral character in exemplifying and embodying the principle of holiness. Similarly, ministers and elders today are expected to exemplify piety and godliness and live a holy life. Insofar as God regards the entire NT church as a kingdom of priests and holy nation this principle is definitely relevant for each of us today. God reminded Israel of His perfect holiness every time they saw a priest through the way they dressed and functioned. The temple, Tabernacle, and the priesthood were all copies and shadows of what was in heaven, and the holy presence of God.

Let's examine how this principle is demonstrated in the passage. The passage is divided up according to its different subjects. In the first part, the priests more generally are addressed. Secondly, in verse 10, it delves into the high priest and his sons. These regulations are more stringent, and we will see why later.

But first, let's explore the general principles of priestly holiness. The first provision is that contact with the dead is prohibited. By abstaining from such contact, they were to embody the principle of holiness. However, this is not the only instance where this principle is mentioned in the Bible. In Numbers 5:2, it is noted that contact with the dead in general brings uncleanness. The commandment was given to put anyone who is leprous or has a discharge or is unclean through contact with the dead outside the camp. Similarly, in Leviticus 11:39, it is stated that whoever touches an animal's carcass that they may eat will be unclean until the evening and must follow the provisions for ceremonial cleanliness. Thus, physical contact with the dead, whether it be with an animal or another person, renders one ceremonially unclean and unholy.

By abstaining from such contact, the priests were to reflect the purity of holiness. This principle connects holiness with life. In God's presence, there is no death, but only life and blessedness. Being outside of God's presence is to have death. Therefore, by coming into contact with something dead, whether it be a human being or an animal, one would be required to abstain from ministering in the temple, at least for a time, to reflect the principle of holiness.

There was an exception to this principle is made in terms of God's mercy for the close relatives of the priest. If a priest's close relative dies, the priest was permitted to become unclean through contact with their dead body. This exception shows God's mercy. These regulations were not absolute rules, nor were they essential to the way of salvation. Jesus later made this point when he was eating on the Sabbath day, and the Pharisees criticized him for working on the Sabbath. Elsewhere Jesus reminds the people that God desires "mercy, not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13). The ceremonial laws are subordinated to the moral law. Love and mercy cannot be negated through lesser commandments. Therefore, there is a principle of necessity and mercy mixed into these regulations. We should not think of them as rules set by a cruel

God who does not care for his people. Nevertheless in how the priests deal with death and how they mourn death, the priests were to express holiness.

In verse five, it is stated that the priests should not make bald patches on their heads, shave off the edges of their beards, or make cuts on their bodies. It seems that these practices were part of the Pagan culture at the time and were done to mourn the dead, possibly with some false Pagan worship mixed in. God reminds them that they should not live as the Pagans and respond to death in a different way. Christians are allowed to grieve, but not as the world does without hope (1 Thess. 4:13). Christian funerals or memorial services may have a lot of sadness and tears, but they also have hope for eternal life.

The principle of holiness is also seen in the regulations for marriage among the priests. In verse 7, it is prohibited for a priest to marry a prostitute, a woman who has been defiled, or a woman divorced from her husband, as the priest is holy to his God. The regulation is even more strict for the high priest, who is required to take a wife in her virginity and not marry a widow, divorced woman, or prostitute. The idea here is that even in marriage, which is a holy thing, the visible formal relationship should exemplify the holy order and norm of creation, which is one man and one woman in a lifelong marital union. The priesthood had special rules because they were a living picture of the holiness of God. They had to exemplify the purity and holiness that God instituted in creation, which will be present in heaven forever. While it is lawful for Christians to remarry after their spouse has died, the priesthood had special regulations to exemplify God's holiness. Just as Jesus restores marriage to the norm of creation, the priest was to especially typify this reality. Ultimately, all these things are a picture of the eschatological marriage between Christ and his bride the church.

At this point, we have already transitioned to the second part of the passage which deals with the high priest and his family. Even as the tribe of Levi more generally is set apart for the worship of God, so the high priests family is specially set apart among them for a unique role. The sons of Aaron are thus "set apart" among the "set apart." As such they have stricter provisions in their typification of God's holiness.

It is important to clarify that nowhere in Leviticus does it forbid priests from marrying. Marriage is clearly allowed for NT ministers just as much as OT priests. The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, has a serious problem in this area, as it forbids priests from marrying, contrary to biblical teaching. The Bible is clear that those who forbid marriage are not teaching the word of God but rather the word of the devil (1 Tim. 4:3). If we are ever tempted by the allurements of Rome, these kinds of blatant violations of God's word should give us serious pause. On the other hand, marriage is not compulsory for individuals. The Bible generally encourages marriage and it is generally a desire and a pattern in the life of most people. Singleness is not necessarily a sin and may provide special opportunities to be of service to the Lord.

Likewise, purity in marriage is a requirement for those who administer the gospel, as stated in the New Testament. Elders must be the husband of one wife and sexual impurity or a violation of trust in this area should ordinarily disqualify them from the office. However, they can still be Christians and members of the church, and there is a path to restoration through repentance and forgiveness. If a man has proven himself untrustworthy in his relationship with his wife, he should remove himself voluntarily from office, and if not, the church should take action to remove him from that position. How can he be trusted to care for God's church if he has so egregiously violated his sacred oath with the wife of his youth? In my opinion, restoration to office after such a sin is at best highly unlikely and inadvisable even in the best circumstances of repentance and restoration to membership. However, the final decision in this regard is

to be determined by the man's presbytery taking into account all the circumstances. Although the Levitical codes and formal holiness have been done away with, the principle of purity in life, especially in sexuality and marriage, continues and applies in every age.

In addition to the high priest and priests for death, mourning, and marriage, verse 16 also contains regulations about priests who may have a physical blemish. This refers to some type of physical defect or disability. In the Old Testament, sacrifices had to be without defect, and this is one of the first things mentioned in the book of Leviticus, in chapter one verse three. This is because it was a picture of Jesus' sinlessness and perfection, and it also indicated that God's people were to bring their best to God. They were to bring the first fruits, not the last fruits, as the first part of the harvest is more valuable than the last. Ultimately, we see Christ in the perfection of his righteousness that he had to have to be a sacrifice for us. However, this passage also highlights that Jesus was not only the offering but also the priest, and because he was perfectly righteous, he did not have to make an offering for himself. This typifies the sinlessness of Christ as the priest who could offer himself for us.

The speaker lists several reasons why certain physical blemishes would disqualify someone from serving in the temple as a priest in the OT. The first and most significant reason is that a blind person would not be able to follow the legal laws and minister effectively on behalf of the people. Additionally, spiritually speaking the temple was a place of sight and illumination, and a blind priest would not fit the formal picture that God was trying to paint. Other physical blemishes such as a lame leg, a mutilated face, a limb too long, an injured foot or hand, a hunchback, a dwarf, a defect in sight, itching disease, scabs, or a crushed testicle are outlined here. What is the significance of these? Remember that the priests were meant to be pictures of holiness, dressed in clothes that symbolized the glorified character of human beings in God's temple in heaven. Their physical bodies also were wrapped up in this typology being a shadow of what was to come, reflecting the future reality of what resurrected man would be in God's temple in heaven.

Although these regulations may still seem foreign to us, they are intimately connected to the work of Jesus. In fact, if we lay the provisions one by one, we will see an outline of many of the acts of Jesus. For instance, the priests were forbidden to marry certain women with questionable pasts. However, Jesus did not have a bride in this world since he was set apart to God and the work of redemption. Jesus is married to the church, the bride whom he loves. But this bride is sinful. It is made up of unclean sinners who have prostituted themselves in idolatry and evil. Yet Christ has taken her to be his own. As the pure and sinless high priest he cleanses her, washing her with the water of his word.

This chapter mentions that a priest cannot come into contact with the dead. Nevertheless, Jesus came into this world as our great high priest and came into contact with the dead in order to give them life. When we read passages such as the story of Jesus raising the daughter of Jairus from the dead in Mark 5, we might miss an important little detail. When he came to bring her back to life, it says that Jesus touched her when he took the little girl by the hand. This would have rendered him ceremonially unclean according to Leviticus 21. However, as the final High Priest, he was bearing her uncleanness and death as a preview of what he would do on the cross. We see in other instances when Jesus healed the blind, the lame, the injured, and the downcast, he not only had compassion on them, but he also purified them of ceremonial uncleanness, which allowed them to be welcomed back to God's presence.

Through Jesus, the sinless high priest, who has taken us to be his bride, even though we are impure, washes us, cleanses us, heals us, takes our death, removes it, and gives us his life. He suffered and bore our reproach and death, especially on the cross. Although he was the holy one, he was not crucified in

the temple, where the priests typically offered sacrifices. Instead, he was crucified outside the city, separated from the typical presence of God.

Through his work, Jesus perfectly embodies the principle of holiness, and he calls us to live in that holiness as we walk by faith, waiting for the day when we will be with him in that perfect holy place. In heaven, we will be free from all spiritual and physical spots and blemishes, glorying the Lord in the temple of God above.

#22 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 22

When you bought your first home, you were likely introduced to the concept of a homeowners association (or an "HOA" for short). An HOA is an organization that sets rules and regulations to make the community a more beautiful and pleasant place to live. For example, some homeowners associations prohibit owners from parking unused cars in their front driveways. Others restrict whether you have to keep your boat in your garage or whether it is allowed in your driveway. Reading them can be kind of tedious, especially if they are detailed.

Similarly, reading the Book of Leviticus can feel like reading the rules of an HOA in a different time and place. The difference is that these are rules for God's home and the association of saints that by grace belong to it. The rules are for our benefit as they teach us about its basic character as a "holy" house. This chapter continues the regulations introduced in Leviticus 21 and thus develops the same theme of holiness. To be "holy" is to be set apart and considered sacred. This, in turn, means that holy things are to be treated with reverence and distinguished from ordinary things. However, this does not imply that common things are bad. God created everything good. But there is a distinction between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean. Not everything that is common is unclean. It simply means that they are ordinary and temporary, belonging to this world. The "holy things" belong to our higher, eternal purpose in the worship of the One True God.

There are three different sections in this chapter that illustrate this point. The first section explains when a priest is not allowed to eat the food offering. The second section addresses who is not allowed to eat the holy things in worship. Lastly, the third section details what kinds of things may be offered as holy to the Lord. Throughout all these regulations, we are reminded that God is holy and that His people must be holy. We can only approach Him when we honor the principle of holiness and purity. Ultimately, we can only approach God through the only true holy one who is the final priest and sacrifice: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's examine how this works out. In the first section of the passage (vs. 1-9), we read about the priests eating the food offerings and holy things. Let's take a step back and look at the bigger picture. When we consider the priesthood temple worship more broadly, all of this is supposed to portray how we gain access to heaven, how we approach God, and what is required for us to remain there. The key principle is sanctity and holiness. Before we enter God's presence, we must first undergo cleansing from sin, starting with a burnt offering and a bloody sacrifice. This is necessary for entering God's house.

The same is true for our homes. Do you have children who play outside in the mud? Before they enter the house, what do they have to do? They need to remove their shoes or wipe their feet at the front door. You wouldn't want them to track filth all over the floor, right? It's the same in God's house. He won't let us enter unless the filth of our sins is cleansed. Once we are inside God's house, we must

dedicate our lives to devoted service to God, which is symbolized by the food offering mentioned in the passage. This represents sanctification throughout the course of our entire lives.

The grain offerings also served as financial support for the families of the priests. The Levites were a sacred tribe that was set apart and did not have land in Israel. Since the land was the primary source of sustenance in an agricultural society, they had to rely on the offerings of the people of God for their food and support. The offerings were intended for both consecrated service to the Lord and the priests' livelihoods. However, there were times when priests were not allowed to consume the food offerings or holy things, and this occurred when they came into contact with something ritually unclean. This passage goes through several detailed examples of such instances, such as leprous diseases, discharges, skin diseases, bodily discharges, and contact with the dead or unclean animals.

So, what is the significance of all this? Once again, the primary point is our sanctification. Our sin defiles us, and if we are to approach God, we must confess and repent of our sins. Weekly worship is crucial for this reason, among others. It gives us the opportunity to come before God and remember our sins, confess them, and repent. The priests had to do this on a daily basis, following the formal codes that governed their office. It was a constant reminder that we need a true priest who is holy, harmless, and undefiled. Even the slightest contact with something ritually impure made the priest unable to fully participate in the worship of God. This was because his role was symbolic of the one true high priest, Jesus, who had to be perfectly holy to bring us into God's presence.

Secondly, the passage addresses who is not to eat of the holy things connected to the worship of God. What is involved in this idea? Well, again, what comes to the forefront is that not only in their actions but also in their office, the Levites were considered holy. Therefore, the holy offerings were presented to God, and when they were given to the Levites, they were offered to God through them. As a result, these offerings were restricted. Only the Levites and those closely associated with them were permitted to eat the food offerings. The text repeats the command that a layperson shall not eat of them. A distinction is made between the priest and the layperson.

However, the passage does not only refer to laypersons, it also includes slaves. It states that if a priest buys a slave as his property for money, the slave may eat of the holy offering, and anyone born in his house may eat of it as well. Some may misinterpret this passage as endorsing slavery as a perpetual institution, but that is not the case. The purpose of these and other laws is not to give a permanent endorsement of the institution but to restrain its sinful effects. The biblical ideal for human beings is one in which there is no enslavement of one human being to another. That is why the Bible numerous times requires the manumission of slaves after certain time periods. In this passage, the emphasis is not on the right of the slave owner over the slave, but rather on the rights of the slave who lives in the Levite's house. The Levite is obligated to care for the slave as if he were a member of his own family. This includes providing housing and food, which is crucial as the main source of sustenance for the slave would come from these offerings. Similarly, in the New Testament era, when slavery is mentioned, the masters are instructed to treat their slaves well, care for them, and love them.

In verse 12 of Leviticus, it states that if a priest's daughter marries a layman, then she cannot eat the contribution of the holy thing. This means that if a priest's daughter marries someone who is not a priest, they cannot have dinner together, and the daughter cannot partake in the holy thing. However, if the daughter is widowed or divorced and has no children, she can go back to her father's house and have sustenance from the holy things. This principle is also found in the New Testament, where family

members are responsible for taking care of their own, but if there is no family, widows can receive regular help and support from the church.

Even if someone unintentionally eats of the holy thing, they must still pay for it and add 1/5 of its value to it. This is because the principle of holiness must be honored, and the things that belong to God are sacred and to be used only as He commands. The food offerings given were for the support and maintenance of the families of the priests and also represented our sanctification before God, where we devote our lives and consecrate ourselves to Him.

In 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, the Apostle Paul references this concept, where those employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings. In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. This means that the ordinary principle of the Gospel ministry is that the people, through their offerings, give support to the Ministry of the Word and to the pastor's family. This enables the pastor to devote himself full time to the preaching of the gospel, and through him, the word of God comes. More importantly, it shows that the people are thankful to God for his provision to them in the Gospel and that this is the most important thing in their lives.

The third section of the chapter is about what is to be offered to God. The basic idea here is that the Israelites are to offer nothing to the Lord that has any blemish. In other words, it must meet a standard of ritual perfection. It's important to note that we are talking about typical ritual perfection, not literal perfection, since even animals, which are not made in God's image, aren't perfect. Although some people showcase their animals in competitions, these animals still have imperfections.

The text highlights that the sacrifices must be ritually perfect, without any blemish, and there are specific imperfections that are not acceptable. For example, the sacrifices cannot be blind, disabled, mutilated, have a discharge, itch, scabs, or any damage to their reproductive organs. One reason for this is that what is offered to the Lord must be the best. He is a great king and deserves our best. It may be tempting to offer the less desirable or valuable things, but that is not acceptable. God is worthy of not just the last bit of energy we have, but the first bit as well. He deserves our best at all times, and not just in the latter years of our lives. He deserves our firstfruits, not just our last fruits. Christ is the perfect example of this, and just as the priests and sacrifices (ritually considered) were pictures of Christ in his true moral perfection, our Lord lived his whole life in perfect consecration to God, devoting himself to his Father's will.

In verses 26 and following, we see a special provision that they are not to offer a newborn animal that is younger than seven days (27). So, no animal can be sacrificed right after it's born. It has a week to be with its mother. It also states that we shall not kill a mother sheep and her young in one day. At first, one might think, "They're animals, what's the big deal?" However, there are principles of holiness to be observed here, specifically the holiness of life. The life that God creates is unique and distinct. New life is a special gift of God. The relationship between mother and offspring is unique and in this sense "sacred" even among the animals. The week-long delay allotted in the passage honors this principle.

Although these provisions may seem tedious or confusing, the overall point is actually quite simple. God is a holy God, and we can't just walk up to His door with dirty feet and take whatever we want to eat. We have to recognize that when we come before God, He's a holy God. We can't come on our own power or in our own strength. We have nothing but filth to offer him. Just as the people of Israel needed someone set apart from sinners to be a priest to serve on their behalf, we need the Lord. Jesus kept Himself holy

and pure, so He might minister on our behalf. He kept Himself perfectly clean and undefiled, so He might remove our defilement and uncleanness. He was the offering, the lamb without spot or blemish, pleasing to God, and the perfect and holy priest and sacrifice who died to remove the sentence of death upon us. He went up into heaven and sent His Holy Spirit to cleanse us from that defilement in His death, atonement, and our justification. The Holy Spirit continues to purify and cleanse us. We still have a priest in heaven who prays for us, to keep us in His care, and to guard us against the defilement of sin in this world. He is holy and pure, and we are unholy and defiled. When we are defiled in our sin, let us turn from it in repentance and ask for the cleansing of the Holy Spirit.

#23-A - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 23:1-3

The key purpose of the book of the Leviticus is to teach Israel some basic distinctions. They are to learn the difference between the holy and the common, as well as the clean and the unclean. These distinctions would help them understand their redemption by God through Christ, as well as their lives in him. So far this principle has been applied to people, places, and things. The priests are from the tribe of Levi, set apart as "holy" from the rest to serve in the tabernacle. The tabernacle is to be in the midst of Israel's camp, separated as a holy space to God. The animals are separated one from another. Some are clean, others are unclean.

In this chapter, these principles are applied to a new area of life. In addition to sacred space, sacred people, and sacred things we are now introduced to the idea of sacred time. This chapter outlines the festal calendar of the Jewish nation, and we will take the time to consider each one by one in our next several devotionals. Today we introduce ourselves to the idea of sacred time by meditating on the idea of the Sabbath which initiates the chapter.

Let's first consider the principle of sacred time expressed in the idea of the Sabbath. This takes us back to Genesis 1-2. In six days God created the heavens and the earth, but rests on the seventh day. This is not just a rest of idleness or total inactivity. Nor is it merely a rest of physical recovery. God doesn't need that kind of rest, for he never slumbers nor sleeps. It is a holy rest. He rests from his "ordinary" work of creating the Earth, blessing and hallowing (i.e. "making holy") the Sabbath day. God sets a pattern in doing his work of creation that he wants mankind to follow.

Clearly, this involves a general common-sense principle that isn't too hard to grasp. If there is a God that is to be worshipped, then time needs to be set aside to worship Him. Given the importance of God as our creator and provider to whom we owe our lives, it makes sense that we would plan and have a special time set aside for Him, rather than simply doing it whenever we feel like it. This is especially the case in a sinful world. In my experience, if there are really important things that I only do when I feel like it, they often don't get done. Even before sin entered the world, the distinction between holy and common time was embedded in God's creation via pre-redemptive special revelation. The Sabbath principle commands that there is an ordinary common time when we can work and engage in all lawful activities, but there is a special day that is set apart, hallowed and made sacred. It is to be devoted to worship. We are to delight in God's mighty acts and rest from ordinary labor.

But the purpose of the Sabbath was larger than the necessities of man in this life. As it is built into the created order, its greater purpose was to show to all mankind that everything is ultimately working towards a great goal and end. There is an era of work and labor which will be followed by a time of rest and refreshment. That not only takes place week to week but reflects the entire flow of history. Our ultimate goal is not found in anything in this world but in the rest, delight, and fellowship we can have

with God. The idea of "rest" expressed in the Sabbath also corresponds to the spiritual reality of faith. At its core essence, faith is characterized by a wholehearted trust in God and Christ. By faith, we rest in Christ and through him enter into our eternal, redemptive rest. Although true faith is not dead and lifeless, its key characteristic is a restful dependence upon God for all our provisions both for this life and the life to come.

The creation Sabbath is not abrogated by redemption but reiterated and reapplied. In Exodus 20, the fourth commandment connects the Sabbath to creation. But in Deuteronomy 5 it is rooted in God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt in the Exodus. Israel's life was one of slavery and hard labor in Egypt. By giving them a Sabbath day, God gave them a day off to rest, to move from being slaves under a harsh taskmaster to a required day of rest. The Sabbath day was required for everyone, including sons, daughters, and servants, giving them a much-needed break from their hard work. Whereas Pharaoh used his authority to oppress the Egyptians with endless work and hard labor, God uses his authority to require a day of rest for all his people--both great and small.

It is often forgotten that the Sabbath day commands us to work. In the New Testament, we as human beings are required to work. Some of the strongest phrases of rebuke are given to those that are idle and do not work. If we do not work, we will not eat (2 Thess. 3:10). We are exhorted to be active and zealous in the use of our gifts in some earthly vocation. We are to work heartily, as to the Lord and not to men (Col. 3:23-24). Six days are given for "common" activities connected to work and lawful recreation.

What about the New Testament? How does this principle come to expression in the New Testament era? During the Ministry of Jesus before his cross and resurrection, he followed the Jewish law--including the Sabbath. It was his custom to go to the synagogue every Sabbath (Luke 4:16). This is an important point because some people view the Sabbath as a harsh and evil thing, especially when they read Jesus criticizing the Jewish legalistic interpretation of the Sabbath. However, the Sabbath principle is not evil, otherwise Jesus would not have been observing it.

What do we see in the pattern of the New Testament after Jesus? After the resurrection the early church gathered on the first day of the week to do acts of worship that were properly done on the Sabbath. We see the same pattern of a Sunday-Sabbath in the time of the Apostles. In Acts 20, Paul preaches a farewell sermon, which was his final expression of whatever he wanted to leave them with before he left. They also gathered to break bread, which some people view as a reference to the Lord's Supper, but it could also mean that they gathered together on a Sunday to enjoy a meal and fellowship together. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul tells them that on the first day of every week, each of them should put something aside and store it up as they may prosper so that there will be no collecting when he comes. On that first day of the week, they were giving offerings, which has always been a part of God's worship whenever his people approached to give offerings to him. In these and other places, we see the early church performing acts of worship according to the Sabbath principle, only now on the first day of the week (i.e. Sunday).

The change of day has theological significance. In the switch to a Sunday-Sabbath, God is indicating that the final rest has already (in principle) arrived. We are already by faith seated in Christ in the heavenly places. The fullness of that rest is still to come. Although the OT saints also had a measure of this foretaste of God's eternal rest, Christ's coming marks an epochal change. It shows more clearly that our lives must begin with the rest God has graciously provided. Just as our rest precedes our week of labor so also faith precedes our good works and are their source. We do not work to earn heaven. We work in thanks to God for God's gracious sabbath provision received by faith.

We need to be cautious when applying this principle today. The example of the Pharisees should always give us pause. Jesus said they were so meticulous in law-observance that they strained out gnats but swallowed camels. It's a humorous image to consider: picking out tiny insects but ingesting large mammals whole. What a vivid image of our human tendency to hypocrisy! The tendency is seen today in conservative Judaism where rabbis debate whether it's lawful to turn on a light switch on the Sabbath and whether that counts as "kindling fire in their dwelling place" due to the electric current involved in the process. This kind of strictness misses the point. It goes without saying that if an individual is aggressively attacking another based on perceived or incidental Sabbath violations they need to consider whether they are truly embodying the rest and peace of the kingdom of God. As with all of God's commandments, our chief concern should be whether we are falling short or growing in God's ways. To combine Jesus's metaphors leave behind the gnat straining and the speck-removing with respect to men and put our focus on the living God.

There are, of course, exceptions to the general rule governing the sabbath. Our Reformed tradition speaks of "works of necessity and mercy" which are permitted. Jesus established this principle by his example: he ate heads of grain on the Sabbath and performed miracles of healing. First responders, doctors, nurses, pastors, and many other all often have a lot of work to do on a Sunday. Where possible, there should be a rotation of responsibilities for such workers so that they are not detained every week from being able to worship on Sunday. Likewise, if they are free during the evening hours on a Sunday they should take advantage of an evening service that many churches still convene. The Sabbath was never designed to forbid such works of necessity and mercy. Many critics of the Sabbath principle make arguments that basically ignore this provision.

The Sabbath is to be approached as a blessing and a delight. For one day we can leave behind the worries and toil of this temporal world and be refreshed in God's eternal light. This attitude must shape our whole approach to how we are to observe it and how we encourage others to do the same. At the same time, our sinful natures are not at all inclined to bring ourselves to worship the living God. What a blessing to have a day of rest to devote to our Lord!

The heart and core of this text is that we need to approach the Lord's Day as a sacred time. In this, we recognize that the busyness of life is often not conducive to devoting ourselves to the worship of God. How many of you had have ended a day that was so busy that you said, "I haven't even read my Bible and prayed today!" How often does that happen? Probably more frequently than we'd like to admit. But look what God gives you! He gives you a special day, a sacred day, and a sacred time in which you are free to give yourself fully and completely to him--so far as the limitations of this present life will allow. And why do you and I need that?

Because we are sheep that often go astray. You and I need the Lord to keep us on that path. The Sabbath gives us sacred time to be fed along the way and gives us that reminder that our work in this world is not our final identity. Our ultimate end is that one day God will bring a final Sabbath rest. When we depart this life and end our labors, we will enter into the full Sabbath rest of Christ:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" (Rev. 14:13).

#23-B - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 23:4-8

As we saw in the previous devotional, this chapter introduces us to the concept of sacred time. Just as there are sacred people (i.e., priests), places (i.e. the tabernacles), and things (clean vs. unclean animals, etc), so also there is sacred time. This is seen from creation onwards in the pattern of a weekly sabbath-- a cycle of six days of labor and one day of holy rest and worship.

In the time of Moses another "layer" of regulations regarding sacred time was added by God, governing the yearly pattern of their life as a nation. Israel was to observe a series of feasts throughout the year which would remind them of God's past deliverance of them in the Exodus, but also look forward to the fulfillment of these things in Christ.

Today we consider two feasts placed side by side in Israel's calendar: the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. We cannot say everything about these feasts in this devotional, but here are some essential points to consider.

Every story has a beginning. That includes the stories of families, nations, and businesses. When we look up a business or restaurant, online we often find a page describing its history and how it began. Some companies even celebrate their anniversaries with big sales, events, or company parties for the employees. Similarly, nations like ours mark their beginnings with holidays like July 4th or Independence Day. The Israelites also had a special day, the feast of Passover, which commemorated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and their freedom as a nation. This was their "beginning" as a formal nation.

The Passover Feast reminds us that before God, nothing can "begin" between sinful man and the Lord without the shedding of blood. Leviticus 1 begins a discussion of the various offerings to be presented to the Lord in worship. It begins with a blood sacrifice (i.e. the burnt offering). Just as the first sacrifice is a bloody one, so is the first feast on Israel's calendar. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, no acceptable worship, and no life of consecrated obedience to the Lord. This aspect of our redemption is called "expiation" or the removal of our sins. It is absolutely foundational. All forms of Christianity that neglect to ground our approach to God on this bedrock are inconsistent at best and false at worst.

In addition to expiation, there is also an element of consecration embodied in this feast. While not foundational in the sense that Christ's atonement is, it is still an essential component of our salvation. The freedom we receive from sin in Christ's redemption is comprehensive. We are freed not only from the guilt of our sins (our justification) but also from its enslaving power in our lives (regeneration and sanctification). In NT terms, the Bible teaches that through union with Christ we receive these benefits distinctly, simultaneously and inseparably. Combine them and you make justification by works and destroy the Gospel. Separate them and you become an antinomian (i.e. someone who thinks it's okay to sin because God will forgive you).

Typological indications of the inseparable connection between expiation and consecration are present in the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. After expiation through the sacrifice of the burnt offering, the grain offering symbolized consecration through the devotion and work needed to cultivate crops. A grain offering brought the fruit of the field, which involved a long-term commitment to work and tend the soil. This a very good picture of the pledge of devotion to God representing the renewal and commitment of our lives following forgiveness and justification. Also in the Passover, God commanded the people to eat the sacrificial lamb in haste before they fled, indicating the need to commune with God in fellowship and conversation. The "hastiness" of the event underscored its urgency as a part of the life

of the Israelites before God. The fellowship offering also allowed the offerer to eat, symbolizing the friendship and communion between God and the believer. Therefore, while expiation and consecration are distinct, they go hand in hand in the journey of redemption. God desires that we be free from both the guilt and power of sin; that we embrace Christ both as savior and as Lord; that we offer to him both faith and obedience; that we have both the blood and Spirit of Christ upon us.

The feast of Unleavened Bread was joined to the Passover, indicating a connection between the two. As we know, this feast is not a bloody sacrifice, but rather a time when unleavened bread is eaten before the Lord, symbolizing fellowship with one another and with God. This reinforces what we said above about the connection between expiation and consecration. We saw a sense of haste or urgency in embracing the message of redemption, as symbolized by the Passover. This is demonstrated by the commandment to eat the Passover lamb quickly, with sandals on and belts tucked in, ready to run if necessary. This principle of urgency is also present in the feast of unleavened bread, as this type of bread is quick to make, illustrating the need for quick action when responding to the message of redemption.

The feast of unleavened bread also represents our sanctification and consecration to God, requiring us to actively purge sin from our lives. The leaven within us represents sin, which can spread and corrupt us if not removed. Just as we are to remove leaven from our bread, we must also remove sin from our hearts and lives. This is vital in our Christian walk as we pursue a life of unleavened sincerity and truth. Paul draws upon this imagery in 1 Corinthians, emphasizing the importance of purging out the old leaven and living in sincerity and truth as consecrated believers.

Ultimately, the call to repent and believe in the Gospel is at the heart of Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread. These are the basics of redemption and for this reason, they are set before Israel at the start of each year. We may think that we have already laid this foundation in our lives and might be eager to move on to more "interesting" spiritual topics, but there is a reason God repeats them so often in Israel's calendar and throughout history. The Gospel is beautifully simple but completely contrary to our sinful inclinations. We are saved through Christ's sacrifice, but we are also called to live in fellowship with one another and in devotion to God, actively pursuing a life free from sin. We trust not in our works but in the works of Christ to remove our sins. At the same time, we give ourselves urgently and quickly to a life of consecration knowing that our time on earth is short. By faith, we can be assured that we will be fully delivered from the tyranny of the devil and through Christ enter into an eternal sacred time when we pass into glory with him.

#23-C - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 23:9-14

Fall and winter can be challenging seasons, especially in this area. In many years they seem to blend together into a long slog of darkness, cold, and rain. As the days slowly grow longer at the turn of the year we eagerly anticipate the arrival of a new season: spring. The signs of its imminent arrival are unmistakable. During the first stretch of warm days, we will begin to see colorful flowers lining the streets or blooming in the church flowerbeds. Fall has its colors and beauty as well. But with Spring it is different. For this reason, spring has often been associated with the beauty of change associated with renewal and new life.

Something similar is happening here in Leviticus with the feast of Firstfruits. Israel's yearly calendar began with a Feast that had a wintery, somber note. Just as fall gives an indication of death and decay with the falling of the leaves of the trees, so also Passover was marked by the necessity of death due to sin. During it, Israel was also reminded of the plague of darkness that afflicted the Egyptians. Firstfruits,

however, corresponds to the new life and rebirth of spring. In his wisdom, God chose to establish the feast of Firstfruits during this season of the year. As we shall see, this is not without profound spiritual and theological significance.

First, let us discuss the details of the basic elements of the feast itself, along with its timing in the calendar and its relationship to the other feasts. Then we will reflect more directly on its spiritual significance.

This feast took place around the time of Passover and Unleavened Bread, and at its heart was a wave offering of the firstfruits, a sheaf that marked the beginning of the harvest that was to be presented to the Lord. This offering was combined with a great number of other offerings that were given to the Lord at the same time. The wave offering was unique, as the offering was waved and lifted high before the Lord so that it could be visible to all who could see it. Then, a burnt offering was given to the Lord, which was a bloody sacrifice - a male lamb, one-year-old, without blemish. In addition to the wave and burnt offerings, there was a grain offering, which included specific provisions as a food offering and a pleasing aroma to the Lord, and finally, a drink offering with wine was given.

This feast, as described in the Book of Leviticus, covered almost the full scope of general offerings that could be given to the Lord at this time. There is something very significant about this feast, as it sums up and brings to culmination what these things typologically represent in God's people and in their lives. Thus, there is something comprehensive and culminating about it.

The Feast of Harvest, listed in verse 15 and following, is different from the Feast of Firstfruits. The Feast of Firstfruits marks the beginning of harvest time, while the Feast of Harvest marks the end of it. The Feast of Firstfruits historically marked the fact that Israel was in God's land, and what Israel was to do as they looked at that land was to remember that God had brought them to it. It was a land flowing with milk and honey, rich with grapes, figs, and all kinds of fruitfulness. Their life in that land, because of its fruitfulness, would be a perpetual feast to the Lord. So the Feast of Firstfruits not only represented a comprehensive offering to the Lord, but it also marked the culmination of God's work of redeeming and saving them from the Egyptians as he brought them into the promised land.

One final thing to note is the day upon which the priest offers the wave offering to the Lord. Verse 11 tells us that it is on the day after the Sabbath that the priest shall wave it. If you're a Jew observing the Sabbath, it would be on a Saturday, so the day after the Jewish Sabbath would be Sunday or the Christian Sabbath. This, in a way, anticipates the change of the Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday in the NT. This is significant, particularly when we consider the spiritual significance of this feast day. Just as we rejoice and take delight in the first bit of harvest that comes, Israel marked off the beginning of that harvest in the promised land with this feast of Firstfruits.

So much for the general comments about the details of the Feast. What is its theological and spiritual significance for us as Christians?

First, by observing the feast faithfully, Israel was to learn a spiritual lesson about consecrating their lives to God. The significance of the feast can be summarized in two points. Firstly, the observance of the feast made the whole harvest of Israel a holy and sacred enterprise. This principle is explained by the apostle Paul in Romans 11:16, where he states that if the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole lump of dough. By setting apart the first bit of the harvest and presenting it to the Lord, it became a representative for the

entire harvest, reminding Israel that everything they possessed was ultimately set aside for the service and glory of God.

Morally, the feast served as a reminder that even as they gave a tithe of their income to the Lord, everything they possessed was to be dedicated to the service and glory of God. This principle applies to us in our giving today as well. While we are called to give in proportion to what we have, we should do so with the understanding that everything we possess ultimately belongs to God and should be used for His glory.

Secondly, the feast of First Fruits was a sign of the consecration of all aspects of Israel's life as holy to God. The burnt offering that accompanied the feast symbolized the need for cleansing with the blood of a sacrifice. Even the sanctified service of God's people done in true faith is imperfect and cannot be presented to God on its own. Thus, the offering of the first fruits pointed to the principle of consecration and dedication of life to God that required cleansing with the blood of a sacrifice.

The feast of First Fruits reminded Israel that not only the firstfruits but the whole harvest, and in their lives as a nation with all their possessions, were consecrated to the holy service of God. This lesson applies to us as well, as we seek to consecrate every aspect of our lives to God and recognize that everything we possess belongs ultimately to Him. As Paul states, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do it all to the glory of God.

But more than making the whole harvest holy, the firstfruits represented the entire harvest. In an Agricultural Society like Israel, everything depended on the nation coming together to participate in planting, harvesting, gathering, and preserving food. Thus, the process of harvesting was not just a picture of one part of their life but tied into every part of it. The feast of the firstfruits reminded Israel that they were a holy nation, set apart to God. It was a sign that all of their life, in every part of it, was devoted to the Lord.

In the NT period, the feast of the first fruits takes on deeper spiritual significance in Christ. In order to understand its significance, we must look at it in the context of the other feasts and how they point to Christ. The first three feasts, Passover, first fruits, and Pentecost, follow a pattern that corresponds exactly to the timing of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was crucified during the Passover season, and after his resurrection, he ascended into heaven. On the day of Pentecost, he sent the Holy Spirit.

In between the Passover and Pentecost, we have the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The feast of the firstfruits, therefore, is not only a picture of our duties before God as the firstfruits of his people in his service but most fundamentally a picture and sign of the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Indeed, in 1 Cor. 15:20-23 Paul describes Jesus in his resurrection as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. As the firstfruits, he is the guarantee of the whole resurrection harvest that comes later. Because Christ has been raised we are assured that we too will be raised in him. Colossians 1:18 also calls Jesus the firstborn from the dead, representing a guarantee that all other children will be with him as well.

The visible and evident nature of the wave offering in the Old Testament is also comparable to Christ's resurrection. Just as the wave offering was lifted high for all to see, so also Christ's resurrection was a visible and evident thing with many proofs, happening on the day after the Sabbath, a Sunday morning. When considering evidence for Christ's resurrection, we shouldn't just see proof of a single individual's

resurrection. We should also see confirmation that we too will be raised from the dead, according to God's appointment. The firstfruits represent everything in the whole harvest, so the evidence of Christ's resurrection is compelling proof that we too will be raised from the dead.

Some may doubt the evidence for Christ's resurrection, but Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that 500 brothers saw the Lord Jesus at one time, and their testimony is corroborated. This makes it difficult to argue that they all hallucinated or colluded together to lie about the event. We can't go back and do a video of it, but their testimony is the closest we have to eyewitness accounts of an ancient event. We don't have the space to outline it all in this devotional, but the evidence for Christ's resurrection is ample and confirms the doctrine of the resurrection for all believers.

The idea of firstfruits is not just applied to the Lord Jesus as the head of the resurrected humanity. It is also applied to God's people in Christ. Where do we read about that? Well, there are several verses. I'll just read a couple. One is 2 Thess. 2:13. He says this to the church there: "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, beloved by the Lord because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." Note how in that verse God's people themselves--the brothers who have believed in God and the truth of the scriptures--are now marked off as the firstfruits. Likewise, in Revelation 14:4 it speaks of the saints who have suffered as those who have been redeemed from mankind as "firstfruits." Some argue that this is a reference to the early Christians as representative of all the converts of God's people that will come later in history. Thus, there are times when Paul will speak about how he's fully preached the gospel throughout the whole world. This obviously is not an absolute statement in the sense that Paul has preached to every individual in every country. Instead, it means that in their conversion the first foundational layer of the church in the NT era has been laid. The apostles spread that word in a representative fashion that becomes, as it were, a firstfruits of all the conversions that will take place throughout human history. And perhaps that's what Paul is getting at in the book of Romans 11:16, where he's describing the Jews and the Gentiles. There he speaks of the dough offered as firstfruits as being holy, and so therefore the whole lump. Even as the root is holy, so are the branches. Paul's mission was to go to the Gentiles to present them as that offering to the Lord. In this sense, the "firstfruits" of Apostolic conversions were representative of all others who would later come to Christ in history.

But I think there's another sense in which this term of first fruits is applied to every Christian in this earthly life, short of heaven. It's not just the first converts who are the firstfruits of all that would come later. Our lives here as Christians, as we walk in the Spirit, our whole life is a kind of firstfruits of the growth of his grace in us that will one day come to a culmination at the great harvest time of resurrection at the end of the age. How do we know that? Well, look at the way Paul describes our life in the Holy Spirit in Romans 8. Here, of course, he's talking about the sufferings of this present time compared to the glory that is to come. And in 8:23, he tells us that not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await for the adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies. Here the harvest in view is the fullness of God's Holy Spirit, when we will be completely transformed in our resurrection, the redemption of our bodies.

The idea of firstfruits has great significance for our understanding of Christ and our lives in him. It reminds us that we can serve him with joy and anticipation, as the "Spring" of the world to come is already upon us through his death and resurrection. But it also encourages us to serve him patiently, as the final harvest has not yet come. The winter of this world is wearying and trying. The resurrection harvest of an eternal spring is certain and sure. Christ has already entered into it. The firstfruits of the Spirit are already sprouting in our lives. Let us then sow the seed of the word in our hearts that the fruit

of this Spirit may be evident in our lives. In this way, we shall present before the world the testimony of our hope in the final harvest to come.

#23-D - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 23:15-22

Growing up in a farming community in Lynden, Washington, I experienced firsthand the long hours and physical exertion required during harvest time, especially with crops like berries that are abundant in the area. Whether it was picking the berries on the farms or haying the fields, it sometimes took a whole community to do all the work required in a relatively short period of time. Some farms had people working the fields and the factories 24/7. Despite the hard work, harvest time also brings with it an abundance of fresh and delicious produce, even from family gardens planted in backyards. I remember seeing piles of zucchini at the end of driveways in the more rural areas because there was simply too much. It is a time of great fruitfulness and blessedness from God, a culmination of all the labor and effort put into the work. Behind the work of harvest time, there are also the months of labor involved in fertilizing, planting, and tending the crops.

As we look today at the Feast of Pentecost, we are reminded of the spiritual harvest and the importance of dedicating ourselves to the work of the Lord. Just as we must work hard to reap the rewards of the physical harvest, we must also dedicate ourselves to the work of spreading the gospel and bringing people to Christ.

This feast embodies the biblical idea of fullness, from the timing of its celebration to the offerings given and the harvest that is the occasion for it. First, we will look at the details of the provisions of this feast and how they point to this idea of fullness. Second, we will look at the NT fulfillment of these things through Christ and the Spirit.

Details of the Feast's Provisions

Firstly, let us consider the various names assigned to this feast in the Bible to comprehend its true importance. Amongst all the feasts, this one has the most names, and it can sometimes be confusing since it shares names with another festival that precedes it. By the NT era, this festival was known as the Feast of Pentecost. You might recognize this name since something crucial took place on the day of Pentecost in the New Testament that is closely linked to the essence of this feast. So why is it called Pentecost? This is because of the Greek word for fifty. There was something significant about this festival that involved counting time periods. In fact, seven full weeks had to be counted from the day after the Sabbath, starting from the day when they brought the sheep for the wave offering. According to Moses, they were to count seven full weeks, or seven sevens, and if we multiply 7×7 , we get 49. It is thus called the Feast of Weeks because it is specifically marked by counting the weeks, much like children who have a chain counting down the days until their birthday or Christmas.

This feast is also referred to as the Feast of Harvest or Firstfruits. This can get confusing because a previous feast also took this name. The difference is that while the earlier feast of firstfruits took place at the very beginning of harvest time at the first indication of the ripening of the crops, this one took place at the end of the farming season after all the crops had fully ripened and it was time to harvest them. As an agricultural society, the entire life of Israel was tied up in the process of seed time and harvest. Therefore, it was particularly meaningful that they had this feast that coincided with the natural course of events but was also infused with spiritual significance. This feast represented the time of abundance

and plenty, the time of fullness, as we move through spring, summer, and into the beginning of fall, as everything ripens and becomes fruitful in the natural order.

Thus the feast of weeks represents God's fullness with respect to time and history. In verses 15 and 16, it is mentioned that the feast occurs seven weeks plus one day after Passover. The number seven in the Bible represents the principle of six days of labor followed by one day of rest and refreshment, marking the end of a certain cycle or time period. Here, we not only have one seven, but seven sevens of fullness—a Sabbath of Sabbaths, so to speak, plus one. In other words, we have a fullness of time that must be achieved leading up to the harvest. How fitting to start the harvest with the Feast of Firstfruits, devoting to the Lord the first indications of life and fruitfulness. God will not only punctuate their lives with testimonies of blessing, but one day he will bring an abundant fulness far beyond what they could ever imagine.

This feast also emphasizes the fullness of joy that characterizes a time of harvest. Some feasts are solemn, marking our sinfulness and the need for redemption, and they are filled with death, the death of a sacrifice and an animal. But not this feast. This feast is marked and characterized by joy (Deut. 16:11): We shall rejoice before the Lord our God, us, our sons and daughters, and all those who are with us. It is a time of joy because there is food, plenty, and abundance. This is not the winter when we scrape and save and cling to the last scraps of food to get through it. This is the time of plenty when there is more than enough, and no one worries about what they will eat. Indeed, in the fullness of the harvest, there is a pointing to the spiritual fullness of the redemption God brings.

This is also indicated in the fact that the feast involves a free-will offering. There were regularly appointed offerings and tithes, but the free will offering was ordinarily given during times of abundance. We give out of our poverty in a self-sacrificial way at times, but at other times, God blesses us so much that we give out of thanksgiving and abundance. The gift given during harvest time is out of the blessed fullness of the harvest that God provides. In fact, the harvest is so full that in Leviticus 23:22 and following, they are reminded that they have enough and can leave the last bits of the harvest for others. There is an overflowing, plentiful bounty to the harvest that makes it sufficient for everyone in the nation.

There is also a fullness of offerings given during this time. Leviticus 23:15 mentions a grain offering of new grain to the Lord, which is waved before Him as a visible symbol of gratitude. Similarly, during the Feast of Firstfruits, a wave offering is made. The purpose of these wave offerings is to make it clear that that which is devoted to God is truly given to Him, and nothing is done in secret.

However, the offerings are not limited to just grain offerings. At harvest time, it's fitting to offer a grain or vegetable offering, but there are also burnt offerings, drink offerings, and food offerings. These offerings represent the whole cycle of redemption: the burnt and sin offerings symbolize the principle of substitution and the need for blood to take away our sins, the grain offering symbolizes the consecration of our lives to God, the drink offering represents the pouring out of ourselves in service to God, and the peace offering symbolizes the fellowship and peace that come about as a result of God's redeeming work.

Through the fullness of these offerings, we can see the completion of God's work in our lives, including our regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. Therefore, while the grain offering may be the entryway to the fullness, every other kind of offering is also important in symbolizing the whole scope of God's work in our lives.

Note that there is a fullness of participation in this feast, as outlined in Deuteronomy 16. The passage emphasizes that everyone, including the sojourners, foreigners, orphans, and widows, is to attend and rejoice in the bounty of God. This points to the fact that the Holy Spirit, who is to come, will gather all nations to participate in this great festive assembly at the time of the spiritual harvest, at the coming of Christ.

Furthermore, there is also a fullness of generosity that God's people are to extend to one another. Despite enjoying a great bounty at harvest time, farmers were commanded to leave the edges of their fields and the gleanings for the poor and sojourners. This serves as a reminder to guard against greed and to remember the poor, as God has blessed them. Indeed, even a portion of the fullness of the harvest is to be shared with those in need.

Through these provisions, God is pointing his people to a time of fullness, moving from a time of death and substitution in Passover to the beginning of the harvest at the Feast of Firstfruits, and ultimately looking forward to something greater - a great harvest time in which they will experience the fullness of God's blessing. This cycle of feasts points them to the completion of God's plan and blessing.

Already we are getting an indication of how this feast points us to the fullness of God's grace to come in Christ and the Spirit. We will look at this second part in more detail in our next devotional.

This feast is a wonderful reminder of the grand cycle of our lives. To change the metaphor from farming, the Christian life is a race to be run. Although the middle stretch can test our endurance, in Christ we are able to see the finish line and press on with courage to the end. Life in the Christian church is also like farming. There are long months of labor tending the crops, but one day harvest time will come.

As the versification of Psalm 126:5 memorably states: "Although with bitter tears the sower bears his seed when harvest time appears He shall be glad indeed." May God grant us grace to feel the joy of God's final heavenly harvest as we bear the toils of earthly labor in his kingdom.

#23-E - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 23:15-22

Yesterday we looked at the Feast of Pentecost in terms of the immediate context of Israel's life in the days of Moses. We saw that it embodied the biblical idea of "fulness" or completeness, thus pointing them to Christ and the final redemption to come. Today we consider more specifically the NT fulfillment of this feast.

To appreciate this, let's look at the ministry of Christ and align it with the other feast days, giving us a clear clue on how to interpret its significance. When we studied the Feast of Passover, we saw that it corresponded with Christ's passion and death. It's evident in the New Testament that Christ's passion took place during the Passover season. The next feast is the Feast of Firstfruits, which also takes place during that same season. As Passover aligns with Christ's death, the Feast of First Fruits aligns with His resurrection. Hence the NT refers to him as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. These two feasts align with the death and resurrection of Jesus on the line of history.

So, what does the Feast of Weeks point to in the calendar of Christ's ministry? To help, ask yourself this question: How long was it after Jesus' resurrection until His ascension into heaven? Acts 1:3 tells us that after His resurrection, He presented Himself alive to them for forty days, teaching and training them for their task. But before He ascended, He told them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit

comes upon them and that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they were clothed with power.

The writer of the Book of Acts, Luke, gives us a key to understanding what the Feast of Harvest was all about. Just as Jesus died during the Passover and rose again during the Feast of Firstfruits, He sent His Holy Spirit during the Feast of Harvest or Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father and the firstfruits of the age to come (Ephesians 1). Notice the parallel in these events: just as everyone, including sojourners and foreigners, was present at the Feast of Harvest, devout men from every nation under heaven were present at Pentecost. They heard the Word of God in their native language. The Holy Spirit, the fullness of God's blessedness, was there, present in the fullness of the feast.

Likewise, remember that even during the Feast of Pentecost, there was an offering of firstfruits to the Lord. In Romans 8:23, the apostle Paul speaks about the entire creation groaning. This is significant because human sin has subjected the creation to a curse. As a result of this curse, the ground will no longer easily produce fruit but instead swarm man with painful thorns and thistles. Before the fall, the Earth was a garden that could produce an abundance of fruit for humans to enjoy. However, because of the fall, the earth has become spiritually barren. In Romans 8, Paul sets before us the whole creation under God's curse. He connects it to the whole phase of our present lives, referring to it as a time of suffering. Yet he adds this glorious comfort--that we, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, are also groaning inwardly as we eagerly wait for adoption as sons and the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23).

The Feast of Harvest thus provided a sweet foretaste of the fullness of blessings that God would one day bring. So now, God's Holy Spirit is the firstfruits for us. The Spirit of heaven is already with us as we sojourn on the earth. That's why in Ephesians 1 the Holy Spirit is referred to as the down payment of the world to come. This concept of a "down payment" is similar to that of the firstfruits. The firstfruits was a part of the harvest that represented the whole. The idea of firstfruits comes from the agricultural sphere, whereas that of a down payment comes from economics. The down payment is paid as a pledge of the whole loan.

God is aligning all of these things and indicating to us through the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit is the source of the harvest we're experiencing now in principle. We will one day participate in the fullness of this harvest when God comes.

The Spirit is the firstfruits and the down payment. Just as the down payment assures the lender that you have the ability and discipline to pay the full balance in due time, so also God's down payment assures us that we will one day be entirely free from suffering and misery and enter into the fulness of the joy of God's harvest at the end of the age.

This idea is not only seen corporately in the grand scheme of history. It is also manifested in our individual lives. The Bible often speaks of the Holy Spirit producing fruit in us and bringing about a harvest of righteousness. The Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost is the one who produces that fruit. It's an agricultural metaphor that reminds us of farming. It lines us up with the great feast of harvest in our lives of good works. We see the fruit of all of God's work within us.

Maybe you've never thought of this passage this way, but consider what the Apostle Paul says in a few places about sowing and reaping. In Romans 7 he outlines in detail how the Christian has within him both the flesh and Spirit, and that these are at war with one another. He tells us in Galatians 6 that we are directly engaged in a battle for our Spiritual lives, sowing either to the Spirit or to the flesh. As he warns us, whatever one sows, he will also reap. Notice how he puts it: "...the one who sows into his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows into the spirit will from the spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:8). The Spirit is the soil where the Word of God takes root so that it might bear that spiritual fruit in our lives.

In the Feast of Pentecost, God was pointing Israel to not just fill their bellies with food at the end of the year at harvest time, but to the fact that their lives were to be filled with the fruit and harvest of righteousness.

But it's not just in our individual and personal lives that the Spirit brings in a harvest of righteousness. It's also God's people themselves that are that harvest. If we look at Matthew 9, Jesus is preaching the gospel of the kingdom and performing miracles. He sees the crowds and observes that they are like sheep without a shepherd. He says to the disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." With these words, Jesus is describing the future ministry of the apostles. They are to go among the peoples of the nations and plant the seed of the Word into them. In converting them they are contributing to God's great harvest in the coming Kingdom of God.

Just a few chapters later, in Matthew 13, we read a number of "seed parables." The parable of the sower is the most famous, of course, which talks about the Word of God as the seed that is to bear fruit and to grow in converting sinners. Later, we'll read the parable of the weeds. How does it describe there the end of the age when God's people are being gathered to Himself? It's a great harvest. He thus warns the disciples: Don't pluck up the weeds. Wait till the end. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time, I will tell the reaper to gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.

You see, here and elsewhere in the Bible, harvest time represents the end of the age. After the beginnings of its fruit by the Holy Spirit are manifested, and the harvest has grown, one day there will be a fullness and completion to what God does, not just inwardly, but also outwardly. We will be totally and completely renewed. On that day there will be a festival celebration, like this Feast of Harvest. It will also be a wedding feast. It will be the marriage supper of the Lamb. The completion of these things is certain. God has guaranteed it by his Holy Spirit.

We who are believers in Jesus, although we do not celebrate the feast on our calendars, see its meaning and purpose fulfilled in us as we seek to bear fruit, spiritual fruit and harvest of righteousness in our lives before Him. As we eagerly anticipate the final day when Jesus, the great farmer and reaper, let us be grateful for his Word and the abundant harvest of righteousness that the Holy Spirit brings. What Israel understood in type and shadow, we now see in fullness. May we rejoice in the knowledge that despite the power of sin to grow weeds within us, the power of God's Spirit is greater. He will tend and care for his vineyard. In that confidence and hope let us with full purpose and zeal sow to this Holy Spirit and bear the good fruit of righteousness that we may in the end reap eternal life.

#23-F - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 23:23-25

When I was in school, starting from 6th grade, I was in band class every year. Yes, I was a band nerd (as they called us). Most of the popular kids were only in band because they had to be, while the rest of us were in it because we actually enjoyed it. There are two things that were always true for "band nerds" when we played music together: the flute players were always too quiet and the trumpets were too loud. You don't typically read music critics speaking of a band's sudden "blast of the flutes" and the gentle, quiet melodies of the trumpet.

Today, in Leviticus Chapter 23, we have the feast that is not devoted entirely to the trumpet players, but rather to God. However, the distinctive thing about this feast is that it is proclaimed with blasts of trumpets, from which it gets its name.

But what aspect of Christ's work does this feast signify? To understand the significance of this feast in relation to Christ, we must first properly position it in relation to the other feasts and understand its general observance. Then, we must focus on the trumpet and its theological significance in the Bible, which points us to the ultimate significance of the feast. Therefore, our first step is to understand its observance and placement among the other feasts, followed by a closer examination of the trumpet and its theological implications in relation to Christ.

This chapter has been dealing with the subject of sacred time. Just as there are holy people, places, and things, there are hallowed times set apart for God's people. Some of these, like the Sabbath, are more foundational, being rooted in creation. Others, like these feasts, are a typological layer that applies only until the coming of Christ. We have seen that the order of the feasts generally corresponds to the order of the work of Christ, not only logically but at times temporally. The Passover corresponds to the death of Christ, the feast of Firstfruits to his resurrection, and the feast of Pentecost to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Right now we are living in the midst of this feast as far as the general time period of history is concerned. The great harvest that is taking place right now as the word of God goes to the ends of the earth.

So then, what does the Feast of Trumpets point us to in the ongoing ministry of Jesus? On the one hand, you might think that after Pentecost there really isn't anything left to accomplish. Hasn't Christ already done everything necessary, like dying, rising again, and sending the Holy Spirit to His church? While it's true that the work of the atonement is finished, there is still much for Christ to do. Even now, He is interceding for His saints, praying that redemption may be fully applied to us and that our faith may be preserved. It's a wonderful thing to know that Christ is praying for each one of us by name, just as He prayed for Peter to preserve him from temptation and falling away.

But what about the future? We confess in the Apostles' Creed that Christ shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. If we look at the general correspondence of the feasts to the great events in the life of Christ, we can infer that this Feast of Trumpets has something to do with His second coming. And it should be no surprise that the NT description of this event indicates that it's going to be noisy a noisy one, with the sound of the Archangel's voice, a shout, and the trumpet of God signaling the end has come and the dead in Christ will rise.

Now let's take a closer look at the observance of this feast. Leviticus only provides three brief verses, but we know it's the first day of the seventh month, which holds significance because seven represents fullness in the Bible. The Feast of Trumpets, therefore, has an eschatological character, meaning it has to do with the end of all things and eternal things.

There are three key elements of the feast as outlined in the text. First, it's a day of solemn rest, akin to a special Sabbath and festival day. Secondly, a memorial is proclaimed with a blast of trumpets. And thirdly, a food offering is presented to the Lord. It's not hard to see how the Sabbath idea points us to the final day of judgment. It is at that time that we will enter into our final rest. The significance of the food offering in this respect is not as easy to see. But the key point lies in its portrayal of consecration and devotion of our lives and its fruits to God, unlike the burnt offerings that represented forgiveness of sins. This is significant because at the end of all things the Bible speaks of a judgment according to our works. This does not mean that works are the ground or basis of our final salvation. That is a gift of grace just as much as our present salvation. There is really only one salvation which is a gift of God received by faith. That salvation works out in two stages. The present stage is hidden from the eyes of the world and seen only by faith. The last stage is visible, marked by a physical resurrection and glorification of the body. It will also involve a public demonstration of our status as God's holy people. The judgment will be according to works in this theological context: the works will be brought forth as the proof and evidence of our sincere faith, hope, and love for God. The underlying point is that this offering in this context reminds us of the final judgment. Thus, there is no burnt offering listed in this feast because it emphasizes the final sanctification of God's people, not atonement. Nevertheless, we cannot abstract this feast from the others. The bloody atonement of the Passover lamb is the foundation and starting point for the others. God cannot accept any of our works of sincere (albeit perfect) obedience without first covering our persons with the blood and righteousness of Christ.

The trumpet blast has significant meaning throughout the Bible. The uses of trumpet blasts converge on the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. A trumpet is generally used to get people's attention and make a call for an important purpose. It has been used in this way by the military for centuries. The trumpet blast at the Feast of Trumpets thus signifies the end and is a call to attention for what is to come.

There are three aspects to the spiritual significance of the trumpet in the Bible. First, there's the general use of the trumpet as a summons to get your attention. Second, there's military use of the trumpet to get you ready for battle. Thirdly, there's a prophetic use of the trumpet proclaiming the word of God. All of these converge together in the significance of the Feast of Trumpets as it spiritually points to Christ and the nature of his kingdom.

The preaching of the word of God is thus likened to the sound of a trumpet. It serves to wake us up from our slumber in sin. It gets our attention. It serves as a warning of the judgment to come. It also involves a call for God's people to assemble before God, and also to prepare for battle as the army of the Lord against sin and the attacks of the devil. The eschatological trumpet sounds forth from the church to prepare us for the final coming of Jesus Christ.

The Feast of Trumpets is thus a reminder that one day the end will come. The loud blasts characteristics of this day were to gain our attention and remind us that Jesus is coming. Given our tendency to spiritual sluggishness, how thankful we ought to be for the loud reminders that God gives us of this reality. Just as we are not always initially happy at our morning wake-up calls, we later realize that without them we would be late for our important appointments. God does not desire that his elect people be found asleep at his coming, but awake and vibrant in faith and holiness.

Let us then hear that trumpet blast this day and renew our faith in the one who died for us, who rose for us, who sent his Spirit to us, and will one day come again to gather us to himself. Let us pray that the

trumpet of God's word would sound forth clearly from his church and we might faithfully assemble to fight to the end the battle of the Lord.

#23-G - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 22:26-32

Some things are special, and then there are things that are really special. For example, many people think that ice cream is pretty special. My kids love ice cream, and it's a real treat when they get to enjoy some for dessert after dinner. But the most special place to get Ice Cream is a place called "Edaleen Dairy" in my hometown of Lynden, WA. Every time we travel to visit family back home my kids ask to go there. Ice Cream is special, but our favorite brand or flavor is really special.

Similarly, in the Book of Leviticus, we have seen a long and detailed discussion of things that are to be considered holy. But in addition to the general holy things, there are also things that are especially holy. There is a special holy place called the holiest of holies. There is an especially holy priest - the high priest, Aaron. Leviticus 23 sets before us the sacred times in Israel's life, and the day of atonement is perhaps the most special of all. Just as the Sabbath is the holiest day of the week and Aaron the holiest of the priests, the Day of Atonement is perhaps the holiest feast.

Recall that as we looked at the series of feasts, we find that it generally corresponds to the temporal order of events in the ministry of Jesus. The Passover corresponds to the crucifixion, suffering, and death of Jesus, and the feast of First Fruits corresponds to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The feast of weeks indicates the time when God is harvesting his people from among the nations, and the feast of trumpets points to the great day at the end of all things when the trumpet will sound and the great battle and victory will be won.

On the one hand, it may seem that the previous feasts complete the historical order of redemption from the death of Jesus to his second coming. Why is the Day of Atonement discussed after these things? Its placement serves a theological purpose. While the other feasts contain sacrifices, there is a repetition involved in them. The Book of Hebrews emphasizes how this reality was a constant reminder that all the types and shadows were temporary. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin. By placing the great Day of Atonement after all the other Feasts with their sacrifices, there was a special reminder that one day a final sacrifice would come to fully and comprehensively deal with their sins.

As we examine the passage, we have two main objectives. Firstly, we must identify the elements in this account of atonement and sacrifice that point to Jesus. This involves closely studying the priest, the offering, the timing, and other details. [If you want even more details on this, you can listen to the sermon and reread the previous devotional on Leviticus 16 which contains a fuller analysis of this feast.] Secondly, we will look at how God's people should respond to this sacrifice. We will cover the second point in our next devotional.

The first way we see it is in the priest who makes the offering. Generally speaking, all the priests and all the offerings point to Jesus. Any priest is called by God to make gifts and sacrifices for sins. They are able to minister before God and offer burnt offerings and other sacrifices on behalf of the worshipper. But there's something extra special about the only priest permitted to make this offering. The priest who is to make this offering is none other than Aaron, the high priest, and he alone among God's people can enter the Holy of Holies and make that offering. There's something unique about this priest that points us to Jesus as the final priest. Hebrews 9:6-7 explains this point. In verse 6, it is describing the holy place, then the most holy place, and all that's involved in it. It tells us that priests go regularly into the first

section, performing their ritual duties. That first section is the holy place, where you have the lampstand, the table, the bread of the presence, and those priests can minister. Before you get into the temple, there's an altar outside, and if you're going inside, you first have to give your burnt offering (Leviticus 1). But then there's the Holy of Holies where only the high priest goes and that only once a year. He enters through a bloody sacrifice, which he offers both for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. What's being indicated is that what Aaron and the Levitical priesthood represented was not final and permanent, but something special and holy, a priest that would come and make a final, definitive sacrifice. And we have that priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we see the especially holy character of this day and the comprehensiveness of the sacrifice that is made. Back in Leviticus 16, we read that Aaron will make atonement for himself, his house, and all the assembly of Israel. This sacrifice is collective and applies to every group among God's people. Both the priests and the people are included in it. But it is also comprehensive in the sins that it is addressing. In verse 19, Aaron sprinkles blood on the altar seven times to cleanse it and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the people of Israel. In verse 33, he makes atonement for the priests and all the people of the assembly. In verse 21, Aaron confesses all the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of the people of Israel over the sacrificial goat. Simply stated, it had direct reference to all the sins of all God's people. In this once-a-year sacrifice, all the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of Israel were symbolically placed on the animal, and atonement was made for them. This sacrifice points us clearly to the unique and special sacrifice of Jesus when He died on the cross. He intended to save His people, and not a single one of God's people whom He wants to save does not have the blood of Christ upon them to forgive them. This sacrifice is not just for one or two sins but for all of them.

This means that the collective sin and guilt of the nation, as well as the sin of each particular individual, were laid upon Jesus when He died. He died with our sins on Him. Every sin of every sinner among God's people has been completely and totally washed away through the blood of Christ. This sacrifice was repeated every year as a reminder that it pointed to a great sacrifice that wasn't the final one. However, we have in Jesus a comprehensive, total, complete atonement and washing away of sin, not just for the priests, but for all people.

Thirdly, we see the special and holy character of this feast as it points us to the finality of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. This point is implicit in the previous one - if all sins have been atoned for, there is no more need for further sacrifice. The chronological placement of the feast after Passover, Firstfruits, Weeks, and Trumpets points to its character as the ultimate culmination of God's redeeming work, appearing at the end. Speaking of the NT age, chronologically Christ's death occurs at the beginning and not the end. Limited to that era we can say that it is foundational and thus "first" in order of importance. But from the OT perspective, it marked the arrival of the final things they were hoping for. It was, so to speak, the beginning of the end. Christ's death thus marked the arrival of the final sacrifice that would put an end to all other sacrifices. Hebrews tells us that Jesus will appear a second time, not to deal with sins but to bring salvation to those who await him. His second coming brings no new atonement, but the fullness of God's blessing that flows from it. Christ's once-for-all sacrifice at the end of the year is at the end of the ages, after which there can be no further sacrifice.

We must address the Roman doctrine of the mass. Some of you may grow weary of my addressing Roman and Eastern Orthodox errors. But I have seen too many presumably knowledgeable Protestants lured away by their deceptive appeal. Romanism and Orthodoxy are not Christianity. They are a fatally flawed corruption of the truth. Although we hold charity in our hearts towards individuals within this

communion in regard to their personal salvation, we must clearly and consistently defend the truth against their fatal errors.

According to Rome, a bloodless sacrifice takes place during the Lord's Supper, in which Jesus is once again sacrificed for our sins. This teaching is a compromise of what was prefigured in the day of Atonement and what Christ did. The Bible says clearly that Christ died once for all at the end of the ages to put an end to sin. If Christ needs to be sacrificed again to deal with the continued sinfulness of people, it tramples underfoot the Son of God and subjects him to public disgrace again. It also robs God's people of the comfort that the gospel provides. Frankly, a reason the Roman church has used this doctrine is to keep people feeling guilty and get more money from them. The indulgences of the Reformation era are still a part of Roman church life and an official part of their teaching. All these things are a clear and blatant contradiction of the revelation of the Old and New Testaments regarding the finality of the work of Christ. The scriptures clearly state that Christ shed his blood once for us, and he died for us once. There's no need for further sacrifice. Indeed, there's finality at the end of the ages. Jesus has already gone through the end of the world, and through him, we will too. The Roman doctrine would have us believe that he needs to come back and die again every Sunday, an affront to the power and efficacy of the Lord Jesus.

Fourthly, we can see the special significance of the location where the sacrifice is offered, particularly in how it points to Christ. While there were several places where offerings could be made in the Tabernacle and temple, in general, there was an altar right out front before entering the temple, where any priest could serve. Inside the temple, there was the Holy Place where the priests performed their ritual duties according to God's appointment. But then there was the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place in the temple where God Himself especially dwelled. When the high priest went into the Holy of Holies, he beheld everything covered in gold, and the glory of God shone with brilliance. The Ark of the Covenant, which had been with God's people for many years, was kept there, along with the manna that sustained the Israelites in the wilderness, Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. While these objects were later destroyed because they became idols for God's people, they pointed to the holiness of the place.

This location points to the fact that when Jesus died on the cross and ascended into heaven, He was making atonement not for anything earthly but for heaven itself, the holiest of holy places. When Jesus took His human body not just into heaven generally but into the Holy of Holies, He was the first one to bring human nature there. He did this to open a place for us as human beings to dwell in heaven with God forever. This is indicated in the fact that even a weak and sinful man like the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies where God especially dwelled, pointing to the fact that one day Christ would come and cleanse not just the earthly things but also the heavenly things with a better sacrifice, as Hebrews 9 and 10 indicate.

Well, fifth and finally, we see the special character of this feast, which points to Christ as the eternal priest. While this is not directly indicated in Leviticus 16 or 23, the Book of Hebrews reveals that in addition to the Levitical order, there was another priest in the Bible named Melchizedek, who we read about in Genesis during the time of Abraham. Melchizedek was the priest of God Most High and paid a tithe to Abraham. Hebrews tells us that Melchizedek's priesthood is not based on his descent from anyone else, and it is not indicated that it ends through death. Christ, therefore, is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, and because He is an eternal priest, death cannot cease His work or keep Him from His office. As a result, the efficacy of His sacrifice is permanent and infallible, and His intercession

on our behalf is never-ending. There are many more things we could look at, but these are the things that point us to Christ and His final sacrifice for us.

What a blessing to know that in Christ we have a priest whose person and work is characterized by this eternal finality. However fulfilling the things of this world may feel to us, they will in the end disappoint us with their temporal and fading character. In Jesus, we have the highest of priests who displaces the entire order of Aaron. In him, we have one who has gone into the holiest place--not the earthly temple, but into heaven itself. He has offered a comprehensive sacrifice that atones for the individual and collective guilt of God's people for their intentional and unintentional sins. His blood is sufficient. No further blood sacrifices are needed. In him, our consciences have been cleansed. The dread of God's judgment and the sense of guilt that haunts our hearts is passing away so that we might serve in the joy of forgiveness and God's love.

#23-H - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 22:26-32

In our last devotional, we considered how the Day of Atonement prefigured Christ as our final sacrifice and high priest. Today we consider the proper response of Israel to this feast and how it relates to our response to the Gospel of Christ.

What is the appropriate response of God's people to this great event? There are general instructions such as having a holy convocation and observing a day of solemn rest. This is similar to many other feasts. However, there is a particular emphasis on the need for Israel to afflict themselves. In particular, verse 29 states that whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people.

But what does it mean to afflict oneself? Is this a justification for the Roman idea of monks whipping their backs as a form of penance? This approach did not work for Martin Luther, whose constant self-flagellation only increased his sense of guilt and inability before God. At times it almost drove him to despair. This is not what the Bible intends. The Scriptures are clear that the harsh treatment of the body has no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:23).

Instead, the affliction is not primarily bodily and physical, but rather an affliction of the heart. In other words, as they realize the need for God to offer a definitive and final sacrifice, they should reflect on the great evil and heinousness of sin. It is an utter affront to and contradiction not only of God's law but our very nature as image bearers and God's pure and holy nature. We must acknowledge this and say, "That's what my sins deserve!" We must understand that ultimately, Christ had to die because of what they have done. In this sense, our sins caused the death of the Son of God. The only appropriate response is for us to afflict our hearts with humility and remorse (more on this point below).

To be sure, there is a clear problem with expressing this remorse with bodily harm. Even modern psychology (which is by no means Christian) recognizes that this is an unhealthy and destructive way of processing this kind of negative emotion, even though we can at times be prone to it. In our sense of guilt and remorse just as much as in our acts of positive obedience we must remember the Biblical principle that while man looks at the outward appearance the Lord looks at the heart. But we can also beat ourselves up internally by constantly speaking words of self-condemnation, and even by allowing voices of judgment and condemnation by others to echo and linger in our hearts. We can sometimes amplify them, thinking that the pain we internally experience as a result of these efforts will somehow atone for or alleviate God's anger towards us. Some may have a hard time understanding the appeal of this kind of activity. In my experience, certain individuals have a natural aversion to this kind of internal

self-harm. Others, however, struggle with it their whole lives and are quite prone to it (I would definitely count myself among this latter group).

This is not the affliction of which the Bible speaks. Although they have the appearance of godliness, these efforts mask a self-destructive form of dependence on our own strength and righteousness based on works.

Let's reflect a bit more on the significance of afflicting oneself in the heart. We will look at three distinct aspects of this, although there is some unavoidable overlap in them.

First and foremost, it is the natural result of being reminded of one's sins and their heinousness before God. The temple and priesthood play an important role in highlighting the holiness and purity of God, in contrast to the wretched filth of human sin. Everything within it visually represents the holiness and purity of God, from the gold that shines with brilliance to the white robes of the priest. This serves as a visual foil to the Israelites in the filthiness and sin. In contrast to the clean, white clothing of the priests, the sacrifices result in the presence of a bloody mess that stains the worshipper. In this, we have a visible reminder of the stains of sin.

This is clearly demonstrated in the act of sacrificing animals, where guilt is transferred onto the animal, and it is then killed. We all have a natural aversion to death. When we witness it there is an almost instinctual shock that comes over us and affects us emotionally and physically. The whole process is also a shocking and jarring reminder of the spiritual death that results from sin. Just imagine coming to church and having to sacrifice an animal before entering the front! It would be a shocking and dramatic moment. There would be blood and the dead bodies of animals all over the place. What a dramatic and vivid reminder of sin and death! Most would be quite disturbed to see the sight.

This is also seen in the ritual washings involved in their approach to God. We are naturally blind to our own spiritual filth and do not see the extent to which sin has made us dirty. As human beings, we understand this concept from a young age. When we are children, we may not realize how dirty our feet are when we come inside after playing in the mud. Our parents may notice the mud on our boots and tell us to wash them, but we may not even realize that our feet are dirty. We are immediately afflicted with guilt when our parents loudly correct us for desecrating the clean carpet with our dirty feet.

Secondly, the Tabernacle service also reminds us of the end of sin, which is death. This point was implicit in the previous so we do not need to spend as much time on it. Sin is inherently heinous before God. Yet because we disconnect sin from the misery of this life, we often do not connect the dots as we should. The visible reminder of the necessity of death due to sin should cause us to grieve and mourn over our participation in it. Indeed, whenever we see the result of our behavior that might lead to death it is quite sobering. This is true even if the behavior wasn't inherently sinful such as an automobile accident. Student drivers are often reminded of this. Even when drivers are exceptionally careful, lives can be lost through accidents on the road. Those that have been involved in them will often suffer trauma--even when they were not directly at fault. Death shocks us to the heart and sobers our minds. The reminder that we are culpable for the death that results from sin should afflict us in our hearts and move us to be humbled before God.

But thirdly, in the Day of Atonement both we and Israelites believers are confronted with the fact that it was our sin that caused a Redeemer to die. As Christians, we should think about this when we read the story of the death of Jesus. We should ask ourselves why Jesus had to die, realizing that it wasn't just

because of the disciples abandoning him or Judas betraying him. We have to admit to ourselves that it was because of what we did. In other words, when we consider the doctrine of the necessity of the atonement, we must sure to personalize it and apply it to ourselves. As those who love the Lord, we want to serve him and glorify his name. It's heartbreaking to think that our sin was laid upon him on that cross. Jesus had to die not just to atone for sin in the abstract--he had to die to atone for our sin.

However, we must recall that there is a difference between us and the Israelites given our different positions in redemptive history. We share in common with them the need to be afflicted because of sin, but there is an important difference to observe. Part of their affliction involved the fact that the final sacrifice had not come. Thus, they grieved their sin while also knowing that they were still awaiting the redeemer. By contrast, we grieve our sin knowing full well that the final redeemer and sacrifice has already come.

While we still must be afflicted for our sins in repentance towards God, we cannot leave ourselves there when we think of that final sacrifice of Jesus. We must also turn with joy, just like the Israelites. In fact, the Book of Hebrews promises us that because Christ has gone into the holy place, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain of his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the House of God, we can draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies are washed with pure water. We must hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering because he who promised is faithful.

Instead of just affliction, we have joy, assurance, and unwavering hope and confidence because we have that sacrifice that has come. The Israelites also knew this joy in part, as it was characteristic of other feasts. But we have it in even greater fullness through Christ. We have a final sacrifice that is now raised in heaven, preparing for us a place to dwell eternally. This is where Jesus is right now, not just in the holy place, but in the holiest of holy places. It's in that place where the pleasures of eternal life with God and in Christ are preserved forever.

Let us thank God for his great wisdom in positioning this feast in relation to all the other feasts, and for setting apart Aaron to be the great high priest to make this final offering. All the pictures and types point to the comprehensive sacrifice of Christ for all his people and all their sins. It shows us that the place where God is ultimately leading us to is the holiest place of heaven above. We can and must mourn that our sin was upon him on the cross, but we must also rejoice with confidence, knowing that he now lives forever with God and will one day take us to himself. May these things be our hope and encouragement as we serve him in faith.

#23-I - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 22:33-44

In this devotional, we complete our thought on the Feast of Booths which we began yesterday...

To gain a deeper understanding of the theological significance of the Feast, let's first provide a quick summary of how it was observed. The Feast of Booths can be divided into two sections. Verses 33-36 emphasize its restful nature, while 39-43 highlight its festive aspect. It is therefore both restive and festive in nature.

Let us consider four specific things that directly contain specific theological content that informs the meaning of this feast for the Israelites and in Christ for us.

The first element is the idea of Sabbath rest. In verse 34, we read that during this week-long Feast of Booths, a holy convocation is to be held and no work is to be done. This emphasis on abstaining from ordinary work is reiterated at the end of the chapter in verse 36. It is a solemn assembly, and ordinary work is to be set aside. Now, why did they have this time off? Well, because it was a time of rejoicing, feasting, and camping. And if you're going on a camping trip, what do you have to do? You have to take time off your regular work.

This serves as a reminder that when the Bible calls us to set aside our ordinary activities on the day of rest and devote ourselves to worship, we might initially view it as lacking in fun. We may prefer engaging in our own pursuits, activities, and recreations. However, our lives are filled with a great deal of difficult and tiring work. Even before sin, Adam needed a day of rest and worship to be refreshed in his body and soul. Given that our work is now filled with thorns, thistles, and sometimes backbreaking pain, how much more do we need a Sabbath today! The true call of God to mankind is to find joy in God through Christ and His Word. When we are genuinely interested in Him, worship becomes a delight, and we eagerly anticipate reading His Word. If we don't feel this way, we should pray for it. Times of Sabbath rest are a merciful provision. The Sabbath day was particularly beneficial to slaves and servants who served their masters day in and day out. This would be analogous to what we call "blue collar" working people who live in a grind of repetitious daily labor. Sometimes they not only need a day off but a whole week of vacation. During this feast, God granted the Israelites a whole week of rest, during which they were to devote their time to this sacred and festive occasion.

Second, there is also the food offering. This symbolized the idea of fellowship and communion with God and the saints. During the Feast of Booths, there is to be no ordinary work, but the offering of food to the Lord is part of the observance. This, of course, involves some work in preparation. As mentioned earlier, cakes or bread must be made, and the food must be cooked and presented before the Lord. Therefore, while ordinary work is not permitted, the preparation of food for the offering is allowed. This serves as a reminder that hosting a large feast, as anyone who has organized one knows, requires a significant amount of work. These food offerings symbolize fellowship and the shared joy of the community before God, while the restful aspect of the feast allows for rejuvenation and celebration.

Third, there is also the directly festive element to the Feast of Booths. In verse 40, it instructs them to express this joy by gathering fruit from splendid trees. It's intriguing how trees play a significant role in this feast. It serves as a reminder of the lush garden of Eden, with its beautiful trees bearing fruit that was good for food. During the Feast, they are to gather and consume the fruit from these trees. Additionally, they are to take branches from palm trees, leafy trees, and willows, holding them as they celebrate together.

It's reminiscent of camping in the woods of the Pacific Northwest. What do you often do when you're surrounded by nature? Many times, children would venture out and find large pine cones. Have you ever found a remarkably large pine cone in the woods? As a kid, I found it fascinating, like discovering a pine cone as big as myself. There's an inherent allure to it. Similarly, you may come across branches from intriguing trees, and you pick them up as keepsakes. This illustrates how, when we are immersed in nature, we tend to adapt and embellish our surroundings. We decorate our doors with wreaths made from the trees that surround us during Christmas. It's akin to what is happening during the Feast of Booths. They find joy in God's creation, even as they dwell together in tents. More specifically, in being in direct contact with nature they were reminded of the paradise of God from which they fell, but also of the paradise they will attain in the fullness of time through the work of the Messiah.

The final aspect of the feast that bears direct theological significance is the fact that during the feast they dwelt in tents. Even if someone were a king, accustomed to residing in lavish palaces, during this week, they had to leave their house behind and set up a tent. The purpose was to serve as a daily reminder that the earthly Promised Land was not their ultimate and final resting place. Every year, for a week, all Israelites would live in tents. In one respect the feast was retrospective. As verse 43 indicates, they were to do this so that future generations would know that God made the people of Israel dwell in booths when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. He is the Lord their God. This point is intriguing because if someone were to complain, saying, "I enjoy this Feast of Booths, but I can't wait to return to my house," an Israelite would remind them that their forefathers dwelled in tents, not for seven days, but for 40 years. Reflect on that the next time you feel discontented while camping. When the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, living in booths and tents, they endured it for a long 40 years. God used this experience to teach them about the consequences of their sin and lack of trust in Him.

But the feast was also prospective and forward-looking. It served as a reminder that no place on earth can be considered our final home. This principle is not exclusive to the Exodus; it can be observed throughout the narratives of the Patriarchs in Genesis. As we read through Genesis in our yearly Bible reading plans, we encounter the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They sojourned in the land of promise, which was rightfully theirs due to God's promises. But they were longing for a better, heavenly country (Heb. 11).

This Feast holds special significance for us as Christians today. As we study the New Testament and observe how it instructs us to view our relationship with our country, the world, and the culture around us, a consistent theme emerges: this world is not our permanent dwelling place; we are merely camping here. Now, before you think I'm going to urge you to sell your houses and give away all your possessions, let me assure you that's not my intention. It is perfectly acceptable for us to have homes and find comfort within them.

But we must constantly remind ourselves that none of these things are permanent. Even our physical homes are really just temporary campsites. Now, there's nothing wrong with ensuring that your camping experience is comfortable. You can have a warm sleeping bag, cover your tent to keep the rain out, and use a butane torch to light your morning fire. But you are simply camping, and one day you'll return to your house where you can experience true comfort. However, it's important to note that your earthly home is not your ultimate destination. It is heaven.

This emphasis is evident throughout the New Testament, appearing on nearly every page, in every chapter, and in every book. For example, when Peter writes his first letter to the church in 1 Peter 1, he addresses them as the elect exiles of the dispersion. An exile is someone who is far from home, living as a resident alien in another land. Christians are described in this way, and they have been born again to a living hope and inheritance kept in heaven. God's power guards them through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Peter continually reminds us in his letter that, while we're camping in this world, we will face troubles and challenges. We need to keep our focus on our heavenly home.

Similarly, the apostle Paul states in Philippians 3:20 that our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body. This world is not our true home; our citizenship holds meaning in heaven alone. In the NT, there is no commendation for embracing misery for the sake of misery or purposely having less enjoyment. Godliness is not equivalent to self-imposed misery. We are allowed to enjoy the good things of this world in a godly way. Camping, for instance, can be a source of fun and great enjoyment.

We can appreciate the beauty of creation and rejoice in it. However, our hearts and minds should not be tied to this temporary place. We should long for our heavenly home instead.

Hebrews 11 beautifully expresses this sentiment, describing how the Patriarchs, like Abraham, lived as strangers and exiles on earth, seeking a heavenly homeland. They recognized that this world was not their true home and desired a better country, a heavenly one. God has prepared a city for them.

From beginning to end, the NT emphasizes that this world is not our home. It serves as a helpful reminder as we navigate life's preoccupations, such as raising families, working, and experiencing both joys and sorrows. We can find comfort in knowing that the temporary nature of our current state will give way to everlasting joy and rejoicing in heaven.

Revelation 7 paints a vivid picture of a great multitude, too numerous to count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and the Lamb. They are clothed in white robes and hold palm branches, reminiscent of the Feast of Tabernacles. They cry out with a loud voice, declaring that salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. This festival assembly points to the day when God's people will no longer be camping on earth but will be in heaven, serving Him day and night, free from hunger, thirst, and suffering. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

In conclusion, let us remember that while we camp in this world, it is not our permanent home. We should set our sights on the unseen, eternal things and live for Christ's glory in this temporary world. May God grant us grace and faith to fix our gaze on the heavenly home that awaits us.

#24 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 24:1-9

Why is this passage included in the Book of Leviticus? And why does it appear here? Well, if we refer back to chapter 23, the passage we have been examining, we can find some clues. Within the broader context of the book, we have encountered the themes of sacred offerings, sacred individuals, sacred objects, and sacred places. In this section, we have been exploring the concept of sacred time. These teachings encompass more than just mere cleanliness or disorderliness; they carry symbolic and typological meaning about the nature of the kingdom of God.

Chapter 24 may seem to be disconnected from the theme of sacred time which has dominated the broader context in its discussion of the yearly feasts of the Lord. Likewise, in chapter 25, we return to the theme of sacred time with the discussion of the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee. These regulations directly pertain to the passage of time and its significance within the context of the sacred.

Why then does Moses place this material here in chapter 24? In between a discussion of sacred time (i.e. the feasts of the Lord and the year of Jubilee) we return to a discussion of sacred objects (the lamp and the table of bread). Wouldn't it make more sense to move straight to the year of Jubilee?

The positioning of the text gives us a clue as to its ultimate significance.

The provisions of this passage are actually highly relevant to the theme of sacred time. Although the discussion revolves around the furniture of the temple, specifically the items to be arranged within the holy place, its significance lies in the perpetual nature of these objects and their role in the worship of God's people. Both the lamp and the bread highlight the importance of regular maintenance and continuous activity of the worship of God. It is emphasized that the lamp must be kept burning regularly, and Aaron is instructed to arrange the bread before the Lord continually.

These aspects of the temple furniture are not merely static objects; they require replenishment and ongoing attention over time. Even in their fundamental purpose as furniture, they symbolically represent the principle of perpetuity in worship.

So, what does "perpetuity" mean in this context? It signifies that worship will continue endlessly, without ceasing. It is an essential aspect of redemption, as the purpose of God's redemption is to enable us to worship Him. And when we finally reach the ultimate goal of worship, it will endure forever. One day we will be in heaven, and worship will be the desire of our hearts. It will be the central focus of our existence. While there may be other activities in heaven, all of them will be infused with worship and adoration of God. The perpetual burning lamps in the temple and the continually replenished bread in the Tabernacle symbolize this idea of unending worship.

As we examine this passage, we should aim to accomplish two things. Firstly, we need to delve into the specific details of this passage and explore how they symbolize the perpetuity of worship. We are looking forward to an eternity of worship, and these details provide insight into that reality. Secondly, we must understand how this reality applies to us as the people of God right now and how it will be fully realized in the future. We need to see the connections between the symbolism of perpetual worship and its implications for our lives.

First, let us look at how the lamp points to these things. The lamp mentioned in this passage is the lampstand within the holy place. We learn that it is continually lit with oil, as it functions as an oil lamp. The reason for using oil is to ensure that the lamp remains burning at all times. Unlike a wax candle that expires and must be totally replaced, an oil lamp can remain lit indefinitely as long the fuel is replaced.

But what does that candle or lampstand represent in terms of its light? As we gather from other passages of Scripture, the light symbolizes God's Word. God Himself is the ultimate source of light, and Christ is often depicted as the light. Christians also shine God's light through their good works before the world. However, it is through the Word of God that His light shines upon us and draws near to us. Thus, the primary duty of the priests is to attend to this lamp and regularly arrange it before the Lord, from evening to morning. This practice underscores the central role of the ministry of the Word among spiritual leaders. The priests in the OT had a teaching function along with the sacramental ministry of the Tabernacle (see Malachi 2). In the NT age, even greater emphasis is placed on the centrality of the ministry of the word.

Consider the significance of the oil used to light the lamp. It is olive oil, and it must be pure, extracted from beaten olives. This oil holds value and requires considerable effort to attain purity. Similarly, the Scriptures compare their value to that of pure gold. We ought therefore to treasure the Scriptures and pursue them with greater zeal than earthly riches. Similarly, the ministers of the Word must handle the Scriptures with great care. They are entrusted with the light of the gospel, and it is their responsibility to preach it faithfully and diligently, ensuring its purity in their proclamation.

The oil used in the lamp is pure because it represents the light that is meant to shine out into the world. The Bible describes the Word of God as a lamp to guide our steps and a light to illuminate our path. Just as the priests had to tend to the lamp regularly and consistently, preachers today must faithfully proclaim the Word of God on a regular basis. Scripture teaches us that Jesus is the light of the world, and His light shines through the Scriptures. Additionally, we are called to be the light of the world ourselves, and the lampstands represent the seven churches, signifying that the Word of God is within us to shine its light outward to others.

The key emphasis of this passage is that this practice is a statute to be observed forever. Regularly tending to the lamp and faithfully teaching and proclaiming the Word of God is central to the ministry of the gospel. It is not a matter of adjusting the Church's approach based on changing cultural preferences or our visual-centric society. This was the same choice that Israel faced in the Old Testament. Pagan worship was focused on visual images and idols, tempting people to worship what they could see. But the worship of God calls us to listen, to prioritize obedience and faith over mere visual stimuli.

Even in the Old Testament, the visual aspects of worship were subordinate to the audible, the hearing of the Word of God. God's light shines most brightly through His Word, and listening to His voice takes precedence over visual distractions. Obedience and attentive listening are esteemed by God more than outward sacrifices or captivating visuals. The perpetuity of the priests' role in tending to the lamp underscores its vital importance. This is the significance of the lamp and its light.

What about the bread? In verse 5, we transition to the discussion of the bread for the Tabernacle. It is specified that this bread is made from fine flour and formed into 12 loaves, with six loaves in each pile. What does this symbolize? The number 12 corresponds to the 12 tribes of Israel. Hence, there is a loaf to represent each tribe, highlighting the perpetual provision of spiritual nourishment from God.

There are always 12 loaves available to satisfy all of God's people. Why is this? It ensures that the ultimate sustenance, represented by the Word of Christ, is perpetually accessible to them. Moreover, notice that the bread does not become stale. It is to be regularly replenished. Like the lamp which continually burns, the bread underscores the perpetuity of God's provision in his worship.

So, what does this bread represent? Jumping ahead in the Bible, it becomes evident. Jesus Himself declares that He is the bread. He proclaims Himself as the bread of life and the sustenance that nourishes our souls. The bread, in essence, symbolizes His flesh, which He willingly gives for the life of the world. Our lives are not solely sustained by physical bread, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Christ, along with His Word, is the true source of nourishment for our spiritual well-being. It is through Christ and His Word that our souls are fed and satisfied.

But let us also take note of the presence of frankincense on the golden table with the bread. What does frankincense represent? It symbolizes the prayers of the Saints. Allow me to provide two examples, one from the OT and the other from the NT.

Psalms 141:2 states: "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." Regarding the lifting up of hands, this is not solely an expression of emotional joy, as some may perceive it to be. Lifting your hands is not an inherent sign of purer or more zealous devotion to God. Rather, raising one's hand signifies taking an oath or making a solemn commitment. For instance, when individuals raise their right hand while taking an oath, they pledge to tell the whole truth. This act carries significant consequences if broken. Similarly, the lifting up of hands in the context of worship symbolizes a devoted commitment to serving God sacrificially. Hence, the psalmist presents their life's commitment to God as a sacrifice. To be sure, our emotions should be affected by our commitments and oaths. We should love the one to whom we vow our worship and dedication. But the lifting of the hands is not inherently tied to an expression of emotion.

We also find a similar depiction in Revelation 5:8, where the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb, holding golden bowls filled with incense, symbolizing the prayers of the Saints. Furthermore, just

as the bread is regularly replenished, Leviticus emphasizes the regularity of tending to the incense. In verse 8, it states that Aaron is to arrange it before the Lord every Sabbath day as an everlasting covenant with the people of Israel.

So, what does this signify? It highlights another essential aspect of worship—our participation. As God draws near to us through His Word, shining His light upon us, He also invites us to engage in prayer and intercession. The frankincense, representing the prayers of the Saints, reminds us of the vital role we play in communion with God. Through His Word, God illuminates our lives, feeds us with the bread of life, and invites us to participate in intimate communication through prayer. Occasionally we are called upon to take solemn oaths and vows to help us in dedicating our lives to the Lord.

Therefore, this text sets before us the two parts of worship: the part of God and the part of the people. From God's side, his part is to bring his word to us. Our part is to respond to him in songs of praise, oaths of commitment, and prayer.

Now, let's consider how these principles apply to us today. It is crucial for us to remember and remind ourselves of the primary reason God created us and why He is redeeming us. The catechism affirms that the ultimate purpose of humanity is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This purpose is fulfilled as we serve and worship God. In the beginning, Adam was created to be God's servant and to live his entire life for God's glory. Likewise, throughout Scripture, the worship of God is consistently presented as the central goal of redemption and the primary activity of the Church.

This understanding is significant because some view the Church as merely a means to achieve another end. In our country (even in the OPC), there are people loudly demanding that the church speak more loudly about political issues. But the ultimate purpose of the Church is not found in some practical benefit it can provide to society or culture, or to improve our immediate surroundings. Please do not misunderstand me. We believe in a ministry of mercy and care for those in need, and we acknowledge that when more people in a city become Christians, it generally has a positive impact on the community. We can be grateful to God for such improvements.

But the primary purpose of the Church is to call people out of darkness and into a relationship of worship with God. We see this truth both in direct statements of Scripture and in its portrayal of heaven, where worshiping God is depicted as our eternal occupation.

If this is the case, perhaps we need to reconsider the importance of worship in our lives. There are times when physical necessity may prohibit us from attending. Perhaps you are a mother who just gave birth. Perhaps a member of your family is sick. Perhaps we are otherwise physically impaired and not able to get out of our homes. To be sure, there are necessities that prohibit us from worship.

But there are other times when we do not go simply because we do not feel like it. Perhaps it's been a long week and we would rather just sit at home. I am not saying that fatigue may not at times be a legitimate reason to miss a worship service, but ask yourself this: are you too tired to go to worship but find that you have enough energy to do some other activity that is more immediately pleasing to you?

I don't think the church should aggressively police itself in a domineering fashion on this matter. Each member has a personal responsibility before God and is accountable to him in this matter.

When assessing this situation, we need to take the initiative to remind ourselves: worship is by far the most important activity in which we will engage both in this life and in the life to come. God has given us six days for every other activity, and specially devoted one for this holy purpose. In it our hungry souls are fed, our tired spirits are renewed with strength, and our guilty consciences are cleansed with grace. In it Christ himself comes to us and speaks by his word and Spirit not only to our ears but directly to our hearts. His word is food for our hungry souls. It is more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

We all know these things in our minds but often do not feel an appropriate longing for God within our hearts. As God has provided for us in Christ our needed spiritual food may he add a realization of our spiritual hunger for him and its true satisfaction in the worship of our Triune God.

#24-B - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 24:10-23

Some things in life seem appealing at first but later turn out to be disappointing. Likewise, there are things that are unappealing at first but later prove to be beneficial. Candy is an example of the first. I remember a time when I went to the movies I ate an entire large box of sour patch kids. Initially, it seemed like a fantastic idea, but afterward, I felt sick to my stomach. It seemed like a good idea at first but proved to be very bad.

Conversely, there are things that initially seem difficult but eventually prove to be beneficial. One prime example of this is exercise, particularly if you haven't engaged in physical activity for a while. Just the thought of exercising can make you feel sore. However, if we persist and continue exercising despite the discomfort, it gradually becomes easier and less painful. Eventually, we may even find ourselves looking forward to exercise and enjoying it.

This dynamic also applies to passages in the Bible and aspects of biblical teachings. Some passages may initially sound appealing but are actually quite challenging. One example of this is the concept of forgiveness of sins. When we hear the gospel calling us to repent and believe, and that we can receive forgiveness for our sins from God, it sounds like a wonderful blessing. We rejoice at the thought of being forgiven for all the wrongs we've committed against God, even deliberate ones. However, the Bible connects the forgiveness of our sins with our willingness to forgive others who have wronged us. Suddenly, it becomes much harder.

Sometimes the Bible presents us with hard passages that, frankly, we find quite unappealing. Certainly, when sharing the gospel with new Christians, we wouldn't start with a passage like Leviticus 24:10-23, where a woman's son is put to death for blaspheming the Lord's name and stoned by the entire congregation. Yet, as we examine it further, we can uncover a glimpse of the Gospel of Jesus Christ within it.

This passage contains an expression of the Biblical idea of the "Law of the Talon" contained in the phrase "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (24:20). It is an expression of God's retributive justice, i.e., that his punishments for sin will be commensurate to the crime.

As we delve into this passage, we first encounter the general expression of the lex talionis, which is prominently positioned in the middle of the text. Surrounding this central theme is the narrative of a young man who blasphemed the name of God and faced the consequence of death. We will explore how the law of retaliation is connected to this incident of blasphemy. Thus, we see the application of "an eye

for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" in a general sense as an expression of God's justice, and then specifically in the context of this story of blasphemy.

To keep this a more manageable length, we will consider the first point in this devotional, and the second point in the next.

Let us first look at the concept of the *lex talionis* in general, also known as the law of retaliation. This principle is a condensed way of expressing God's justice. However, when we talk about God's justice, it can encompass various aspects. At times in the Bible, God's justice refers to His faithfulness. In other words, when God makes a promise, He remains true to His word. While this aspect of God's justice is true and significant, it does not solely define justice itself.

When we explore the idea of God's justice, we discover that He is perfectly righteous. Everything He does is free from any wrongdoing or evil inclination. His actions align with perfect rectitude and uprightness. God's words and deeds are consistent and trustworthy. This notion of perfect justice can be described using different terms depending on the context. For instance, we can refer to God's justice as distributive justice. What does distributive justice entail? It relates to God's just distribution of rewards and punishments to individuals. God is just in his distribution of such things, which he may graciously temper according to the station and circumstances of each individual. God possesses perfect wisdom and understands why each person receives what they do. It does not always mean that everyone will receive the same portion, but God's justice is characterized by wisdom in how rewards and punishments are apportioned.

Similarly, we can discuss God's administrative justice. In this context, justice pertains to its proper administration through appropriate means and individuals. This aspect is crucial in the passage because it teaches us, as human beings, that we should not take justice into our own hands. When a crime is committed, what is the right course of action? We report it to the authorities, such as the police, who possess the mandate to enforce the law. It's not our role to act based solely on hearsay and immediately take justice into our own hands. Justice needs to be administered by the appropriate individuals. In the passage, we see the presence of a governing authority, including the elders, rulers of Israel, and Moses himself. The incident is reported to them, highlighting the importance of proper administration of justice.

However, when we discuss the law of the talon or the *lex talionis*—an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth—we are primarily addressing what we call retributive justice. Remember this term because it is key to understanding God's justice in its most fundamental sense. Retribution underscores the emphasis of the passage. It conveys the idea that God administers just retribution to those who commit offenses. This retribution is equitable and proportionate.

Now let's reflect on both aspects of retribution: equity and proportionality.

How is this justice equitable? How is it equitably expressed in the passage? Equity means fairness and equal treatment. In the case of God's retributive justice, it is equitable because every individual is subject to the same standard of behavior and receives the same treatment. This principle can be observed in the passage as well. Who is subject to the law of blasphemy? Verse 22 states that both the soldier and the native, even if the native is born to an Egyptian father and an Israelite mother, are subject to the law. Although the situation of an Israelite marrying outside their faith is noteworthy, the law of blasphemy applies to both individuals equally when they are in Israel. This demonstrates equity, where everyone is

treated impartially according to the same standard. Similarly, in our country, we strive for equal justice under the law, where all individuals are treated equally. Any discrepancy in treatment based on factors other than the law itself can be a basis for an appeal, as it indicates a lack of equity. Hence, God's retributive justice is equitable because it treats everyone the same, based on the same standard. Additionally, God's justice is just in the sense of proportionality. This means that the punishment should be proportional to the severity of the offense. For justice to prevail, there must be a balance between the crime committed and the punishment administered. When this balance is disrupted, injustice occurs. For example, if a person receives a \$1000 ticket for driving only five miles over the speed limit, many would consider it disproportionate. On the other hand, if someone causes a significant accident by driving recklessly, and the police officer merely issues a warning, it would also be unjust. The punishment should correspond to the gravity of the offense. In the case of the law of the talon, God's retributive justice, it is just because the punishment aligns with the crime committed. God's justice is not arbitrary or excessive but proportional and appropriate. As humans, we are called to emulate this principle in our relationships with one another, particularly in matters of governance. God sets examples for us to follow, illustrating these principles.

To illustrate further, let's examine the examples presented in the passage. The discussion begins with animals in verse 18, stating that anyone who takes an animal's life must make restitution, "life for life." This provision holds significance within the culture and time period, where animals were a valuable form of wealth. Cows, oxen, livestock, sheep, and goats represented wealth and livelihood for ordinary people. These animals served various purposes, from powering work to providing sustenance. Therefore, damaging someone's property, such as causing harm to an animal, required appropriate compensation to restore what was lost.

But what about when we deal with God? There's something different that happens when we deal with God. From human to human, there are degrees of sin and penalties that we have to pay to make restitution. But when we sin against God, we sin against an infinitely just and glorious God. The only equitable punishment in terms of retributive justice is eternal punishment. Some people might argue that Jesus took our punishment on the cross and he didn't suffer eternally, so how can eternal punishment be just? The difference with Jesus is that he is an infinite person, and even though his suffering wasn't infinite in duration, it was infinite in intensity because he is the eternal Son of God. Therefore, for every sin, we face the fact that we must pay an infinite penalty. The law of talon thus applies to our relation to God. His justice must be satisfied in his judgment of our sin.

We will consider the specific application of this principle in this passage in the next devotional. But I think you can already see how this passage is fundamental to the Gospel. With reference to our sin, the law of the talon is a hard saying. Whenever we break the laws of God or men, we often react poorly, sometimes arguing that the law is unfair or should be changed. Secretly we wish that God's justice should not apply to us the way it does to others. But if that were the case, not only would the world be filled with all manner of chaos and evil, the way of salvation through Christ would be undermined. The Gospel teaches that although we have grievously transgressed against God's commandments, Christ has come and perfectly satisfied the law in its entirety. He has obeyed its precepts, perfectly endured its punishments, and placated God's infinite wrath when he died on the cross.

This teaching may seem bitter when we see it by itself but becomes sweet when we see it in Christ. A God who can arbitrarily change his standards to get us off the hook could also arbitrarily change his mind again and send us to eternal punishment. With a perfectly just God things are different. When his justice is satisfied our salvation is infallibly secure.

Having been fully redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, let us be thankful and walk in a manner that befits the children of God.

#24-C - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 24:10-23

In our last devotional, we considered this text as it expresses the idea of the Lex Talionis or "Law of the Talon": an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. This phrase expresses the Biblical idea of retributive justice. God is just. He applies his justice equally to all persons irrespective of their status (rich or poor, male or female, young or old, Israelite or foreigner, etc) such that the punishment fits the crime. It is both equitable and proportional.

We have already seen the idea in the abstract as it relates to God's nature. We have also explored briefly how this idea of justice is foundational to the Gospel and Christ's satisfaction and substitution for our sakes.

Today we consider the second part of the passage in which the Law of the Talon is applied to the Israelite woman's son who blasphemed the name of God. It is crucial to remember that ultimately, all sin is considered blasphemy against God. There is something inherently foundational about the violation of this commandment. In the Book of Romans, the apostle Paul addresses the Jewish people who believe themselves to be righteous before God. In Romans 2:23 he states: "You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. As it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Each time we transgress God's commandments, we are essentially blaspheming His name, as His law is an expression of His character and nature. This understanding is reflected in the third commandment, which instructs us not to misuse the name of the Lord our God, for He will not hold guiltless those who take His name in vain. Thus, we recognize the foundational and profound nature of this grievous sin.

To be sure, there is a specific violation of this commandment that takes place when we verbally misuse God's name. We cannot turn God's blessed name into a curse word. Just as there are holy people, places, objects, and times, there is a name that is the Holiest of all: the name of God. Ensuring that God's name is used carelessly in our speech provides an important guardrail for maintaining the holy purity of our calling in other areas. This is especially important with our children. By teaching them the proper way to speak of God we are creating a framework for their lives in which God is to be feared and regarded as nothing but holy, pure, and righteous.

Let's examine this passage in more detail as outlined here. Firstly, it is important to note the specific details of the story of the Israelites mentioned. Note the mixed family heritage of the person in view. He is the son of a Jewish mother and an Egyptian father. This should raise some questions in your minds. In the OT, God's people were commanded not to intermarry with foreign nations. The restriction on intermarriage was primarily rooted in religion. The issue with foreigners was not their nationality, skin color, or language, but rather their worship of and service to different gods. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were a nation, and while they were also a distinct race as they originated from one family, their primary identity was religious. At this time there was a large degree of overlap in their racial/ethnic and religious identities.

In the New Testament era, the Church is no longer limited to one nation but encompasses believers from every nation under heaven. We are free to marry anyone we wish regardless of nationality or skin color, but only in the Lord. This does not mean that other factors such as personal compatibility, age

differences, etc. don't need to be factored in. The laws of wisdom and prudence govern every situation! The point is that marriage segregation based on race has no basis in the OT or NT.

However, in the specific situation mentioned here, we encounter a divided family. An Israelite, who is a daughter of Abraham and presumably worships the one true God, has married an Egyptian man. Egypt, the nation from which Israel was delivered from slavery, now represents a potential negative influence over the family, reminiscent of a slavemaster. Clearly, although the Israelite woman would strive to honor God, it is unlikely that the Egyptian father would share the same commitment. Unfortunately, in this instance, one blasphemer begets another blasphemer.

Note, secondly, that the sin being addressed here is not limited to mere blasphemy. It is not as if the individual accidentally hit his thumb with a hammer and carelessly used the Lord's name in vain. While such behavior is certainly not commendable, it does not imply that anyone who does so should be put to death. That is not the implication of this passage.

The reason why this sin of blasphemy is treated so seriously is because it is intertwined with something else. The text states that the Israelite woman's son engaged in a fight within the camp and, in the process, blasphemed and cursed. This is blasphemy coupled with anger and violence towards a fellow man, presumably in a significant and serious manner. It is not a case of mere blasphemy, and the context suggests that the son, as an instigator, bears fault for the violent act.

Thirdly, it is important to acknowledge that the individual involved in this incident is clearly not a young boy of six or eight years old, who might unintentionally repeat inappropriate words he heard from neighboring children due to youthful mischief. Although such behavior is also inappropriate, we should understand that the Israelite woman's son is portrayed as an older individual, at least in his teenage years or older. How do we know this? Well, who was he fighting against? The passage specifies that he fought against a man of Israel within the camp. Therefore, he must be of age and mature enough to understand the gravity of his actions.

Fourthly, it is crucial to recognize that the imposition of the death penalty for blasphemy in this instance does not establish a universal norm applicable to all subsequent cases. It is not meant to suggest that every instance of blasphemy or the use of a curse word should result in capital punishment. As previously mentioned, the circumstances surrounding this event exacerbate its severity due to the connection between blasphemy and violence. For example, in the New Testament, we encounter the story of Ananias and Sapphira who lied about their offering to God and were struck dead in the presence of the apostles by the Holy Spirit. However, this does not mean that anyone who is untruthful about their giving will suffer the same fate. Clearly, that is not the case. Instead, we should understand that this incident serves as a foundational example, a reminder, and a testimony to future generations of Israel. It underscores the sacredness of God's name and the consequence of dishonoring it by treating it as common or profane or using it as a curse word. Such an act leads to spiritual death and separation from the divine.

Well, fifthly, we need to consider the significance of the public nature of these sins: violence and blasphemy. Numerous witnesses observed the incident. In fact, verse 11 informs us that they brought the man to Moses, finding him in the camp, clearly indicating that his actions took place openly. Sins committed in public tend to be perceived as more heinous. While private sins are undoubtedly wrong, the same sin committed publicly intensifies its gravity. Usually, the presence of others serves as a

deterrent for our behavior. We tend to display better conduct when people are around, except perhaps during those moments in the car when yelling and fighting may ensue.

Nonetheless, this particular sin was committed publicly, serving as a reminder that it goes beyond adhering to a religious code of conduct restricted to specific settings. It underscores the fact that God's name is equivalent to God Himself. Just as God embodies life, salvation is found through His name. That is why, in the Bible, the gospel is preached in the name of Jesus, and we are told that there is no other name under heaven by which we are saved except His. This is because the name of Jesus is inseparable from His very identity. This principle also applies to human beings. For instance, consider if someone wrote my name, Benji, on a piece of paper, and in a fit of anger, tore it into pieces and threw it on the ground. How would you feel if someone did the same to your name? It would likely make you feel hurt and disrespected. I once witnessed a similar illustration during a college chapel, where a speaker told the story of someone who held up a picture of a young girl in front of everyone, and then proceeded to tear it into shreds and throw it on the ground. The girl started crying. Everyone knew it was only done to demonstrate a point, and it effectively conveyed the message that our names are intimately connected to our identity.

Our names become linked to who we are, and the same applies to God's name. To dishonor His name is to exclude oneself from the life it represents. At Moses' instruction, all the people of Israel, acting through the appropriate governing authorities, including Moses and the Elders of Israel, publicly gathered to stone the young man with stones until he died. This reflects the principle of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life" — the law of retributive justice and divine judgment.

Now, of course, I could simply conclude with an "Amen" at this point. However, that would overlook how this passage, which initially appears challenging, is actually pointing us to something quite wonderful.

How so? If we look ahead in the Bible, we encounter a remarkably similar situation that serves as a mirror image and reverse of what occurs in Leviticus 24. What am I referring to? I'm talking about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, our Savior. Do you remember where Jesus was brought?

He was brought before the entire Council and the high priest, seated in Moses' seat. Just as the son of the Egyptian mother and Israelite father stood before Moses, Jesus now stands before those who sit in Moses' seat. In this passage from the Old Testament, we witnessed an Egyptian son appearing before those elders. However, who stands before them now? It is the Son of God. Interestingly, Leviticus 24 places significant emphasis on the fact that this individual is a son—the son of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian father. We even know the name of the mother. Furthermore, what question was posed to Jesus during that trial? In Mark 14:61, they asked Him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Hence, we have those who sit in Moses' seat, a son facing trial.

Similarly, in Leviticus 24, many witnesses observed the sin. It was a public act, witnessed by all. And now, in the trial of Jesus, we again have numerous witnesses. But are they testifying to the truth? No, they are conflicted, providing false testimonies that contradict one another. In the Old Testament, during Leviticus 24, whom did they consult to discern how to handle the matter? Did they seek the Lord's counsel? The emphasis lies in this point. They placed the young man in custody, as stated in verse 12, until the Lord's will would be made known. Then, God instructed them on what they should do. However, what happens with Jesus? These are the ones sitting in Moses' seat and possessing the Word of God. Do they consult the Word? No, they reject it. And what charge is brought against Jesus in Mark 14? They ask Him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" His response is the truth: "I am, and you will see the Son of Man

seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven." In response, the high priest tears his garments and declares, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned Him as deserving of death.

Can you see the parallels? They are difficult to miss. In Leviticus 24, the one who committed blasphemy and attempted violent murder is justly put to death. In the case of Jesus, the one who perfectly honored the name of God and was the Son of the Father is falsely accused of blasphemy and put to death. It is a mirror image of what unfolds in Leviticus 24. However, something extraordinary occurs in both cases. God's retributive justice is fulfilled—once through the condemnation and death of the sinner, and the other through the condemnation and death of the sinless. Thus, the righteous one bears the penalty for the unrighteous. The one who honored God and never blasphemed takes upon Himself the penalty for those of us who blasphemed the name of God. So it was that Jesus, unjustly accused of blaspheming the name of God, suffered and died. But what happened to Him after His death? The Bible tells us that He was resurrected and highly exalted. What did God grant Him? He bestowed upon Him the highest name, a name above all names, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, we must hold His name in deep reverence in our hearts and honor it in our speech, knowing that there is no other name under heaven through which we can find salvation.

Let us then live in profound gratitude for Christ's work, and how this passage beautifully reminds us of the justice that was fulfilled in him. He bore all our sins in his body on the tree that may we die to our sins and live to righteousness. Let us only take this holy and great name of Jesus upon our lips in words of praise, honor, and holiness. For there is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved.

#25-A - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 25:1-7

Farmers know that in order for a field to bring a continual crop yield you have to give the land time to rest and replenish. In South America, large portions of the rainforest were at one time cleared to create farmland. Initially, the soil in the rainforest is incredibly fertile and nutrient-rich. However, when the land is used year after year with no rest, its productivity declines, often leading to abandoned and barren wastelands.

This principle applies not only to land but also to people. If we try to extract maximum productivity from employees without providing them with breaks and rest, they will eventually wear down, quit their jobs, or become less productive. Adequate rest, when properly balanced, can actually enhance productivity.

This passage emphasizes the importance of rest for God's people. Leviticus 25 discusses the Sabbath, not solely as a single day of rest for man, but also as a yearly Sabbath for the land. The rule states that when they eventually settle in the land and engage in agricultural activities, there should be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land every seven years. While there are practical agricultural reasons for implementing this practice, such as allowing the soil to replenish its nutrients and ensuring sustainable crop production, there is also profound theological significance behind the Sabbath for the land.

In order to grasp the significance of this text, we need to align it with the history of redemption, connecting the concept of the Sabbath to not only human beings but also the earth and the land they occupy, where they work, serve, and glorify God.

The Sabbath was first established during creation. When God placed man on this earth, he intended for them to rule over creation, exercise dominion, fill the earth, and subdue it. This entailed work. However, following the pattern of God Himself, every seventh day was designated for rest. Although the Sabbath was made for man, this rest also held significance for the rest of creation, albeit indirectly. Since Adam and Eve rested from their work, which involved tending to creation, the rest extended to the entire realm of creation. This cosmic significance of the Sabbath is evident even from the beginning and is not limited to personal application for human beings, although that remains the primary focus.

The scope of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 also extends beyond human beings, including animals as well. Not only God's people but also their livestock are to rest on the Sabbath day. This broader application reveals the implications of the Sabbath idea for the entire creation. Likewise, when we consider the flipside of the Sabbath commandment, we are reminded that Adam and Eve were meant to work for six days and then enter into rest. God had assigned them a task, and at the end of their work, there would be a reward of rest. However, they failed to fulfill this task due to their sin of eating the forbidden fruit. Consequently, they would no longer enter into God's rest through the Sabbath but would experience the curse. In Genesis 3:14, God pronounced a curse on the serpent, and by extension, on the animals as well. Similarly, when addressing Adam in verse 17, God cursed the ground, which would produce pain, toil, thorns, and thistles. This curse affected creation itself, which God had originally intended to glorify Him and serve as a means for humanity to bring glory to God. Instead of producing fruit that would nourish and enable mankind to serve and glorify the Lord, the cursed creation yielded thorns and thistles. However, in His mercy, God still allows fruit to grow alongside these thorns and thistles.

Consider the analogy of a rose: its stem inflicts pain, yet it blooms with glorious beauty, displaying colors that glorify God and manifest His goodness. Another example is blackberries, which grow on thorny bushes. Although enjoying the sweetness of blackberries often results in scratches from the thorns, it serves as a reminder that creation, once intended to contribute to our journey towards rest, now carries the weight of the curse. God mingles reminders of rest and refreshment along with the pain and toil of sin.

You can see how, on the other hand, the failure of Adam underscores the creational and cosmic implications of the Sabbath principle. The consequences of Adam's sin have affected the entire world, drawing everything into the mire of its aftermath. All of creation, not just human beings, was originally intended to contribute to the realization of Sabbath rest. However, we have fallen short of that goal, failing to attain the rest and the glory of God. Instead of leading us toward heavenly glory, the ground now drags us down to the dust of death. Even from the very beginning, the Sabbath principle held significance for the entire creation.

However, this text not only looks back to creation but also points us to the significance of the Sabbath in the Exodus. Let's consider the parallel between Leviticus 25 and the events in Exodus. In Leviticus 25, the command is given to refrain from working the land commercially every seventh year. This doesn't mean they can't eat any plants, as that would lead to starvation. Rather, they are instructed not to till and cultivate the land in a systematic, industrious manner. They are to let the land rest and grow whatever it naturally yields. During that year, they are to trust in the Lord for their food. The Sabbath of the land provides food not only for themselves but also for their slaves, hired workers, sojourners, and even the wild animals in their land.

This command in Leviticus 25 mirrors a similar situation in the Exodus. In Exodus 16, the Israelites, who had recently escaped from Egypt, found themselves grumbling about their lack of food in the wilderness. They longed for the days when they sat by the meat pots in Egypt. They were willing to trade their newfound freedom for the comfort of a full stomach. Yet, even in the midst of their grumbling, God provided for them. He delivered just enough for their survival.

Isn't it interesting how this reflects our own sinful tendencies? Sin holds us in bondage, dragging us down and offering fleeting pleasures. We are reluctant to give up sin because we fear losing the temporary enjoyment it brings, despite the inevitable misery it ultimately produces.

For the Israelites, the land was a gift from God, and they were called to work it, keep it, and cultivate it, envisioning a restored Garden of Eden. However, just as they observed a Sabbath rest every seventh day in the wilderness with manna, they were also instructed to cease working the land every seventh year. This period of rest was a reminder that the fruitfulness and blessing of the land did not depend on their own efforts or strength but rather on God Himself. They were to rest and trust in Him.

The idea of faith and the Sabbath are closely connected concepts. Both involve the idea of rest. Faith involves receiving and relying on Christ for our salvation, but it doesn't mean we abstain from all work and good deeds as Christians. On the contrary, we are called to do good works and carry out our responsibilities. Yet, the Sabbath principle teaches us the importance of setting aside one day a week to cease from our labors, listen to God, and receive His blessings by faith. In the case of the Sabbath year, this principle extended to an entire year of rest. Each day, the Israelites would wake up with the urge to work, but they had to resist that impulse. They couldn't rely on their own abilities to produce the food they needed. Instead, they had to trust in God's providential care to provide for them.

This principle echoes Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, where He addresses anxiety and worry. Reflecting on passages like Leviticus 25, He urges us not to be anxious about our basic needs such as food, drink, or clothing. He points to the birds of the air, highlighting how God provides for them without their toiling. Even Solomon, in all his splendor, couldn't compare to the beauty of God's provision for the plants of the field. The Israelites needed to remember and contemplate these truths during the Sabbath year. They were reminded that God, in His wisdom, provided for them just as He did for the animals, birds, and creatures of the land. Therefore, the Sabbath was not only a time of rest for Israel but also a recognition of God's provision for the land.

An intriguing aspect of this passage, especially when we consider the following chapter, is that it is not only associated with blessing but also with curses and judgment. In Leviticus 26, immediately following the discussion of blessings for obedience, a much greater portion is dedicated to describing the punishments for disobedience. It is noteworthy to observe how the curse, resulting from rebellion and idolatry, is connected to the Sabbath principle.

Leviticus 26:34 states that when Israel is scattered among the nations, the land will enjoy its Sabbath as long as it lies desolate. While the Israelites dwell in their enemies' land, the land will rest and experience its Sabbaths, which it did not have when the Israelites inhabited it. This passage reveals that the Sabbath for the land holds deeper spiritual significance beyond agricultural aspects. The land is considered holy because God has purified and cleansed it by expelling foreign nations, allowing His holy people to enter and find rest there. However, when Israel turns away from God in their hearts, they bring corruption, pollution, and desecration to the land that was intended to be clean. Thus, the Sabbath for the land does not bring fruitfulness and blessing; instead, it signifies desolation. Leviticus 26 prophetically foreshadows

this outcome. The fulfillment of these prophetic words is witnessed in 2 Chronicles 36. The Babylonian king's invasion and the subsequent enslavement of Israel are described, and it is mentioned that these events occurred to fulfill the prophecy spoken by Jeremiah. The land observed its Sabbaths during the entire period of desolation, amounting to 70 years.

It is essential to recognize the positive aspect in Leviticus 26 amidst this backdrop of judgment. Verse 40 highlights that if the Israelites confess their iniquity, the sins of their forefathers, and their treachery against God, and if their hearts are humbled and they make amends for their iniquities, God will remember His covenant and the land. The land, although abandoned by them and lying desolate, will once again enjoy its Sabbaths. The passage hints at a time when the Sabbath of curse will be transformed into a Sabbath rest of blessing, characterized by restoration and forgiveness.

And where do we witness the fulfillment of these things? We see it manifested in the person and work of Christ. What did Jesus encounter except the curse meant for the disobedient? He was righteous, yet he bore the consequences of our unrighteousness. The Gospel of Luke vividly portrays this suffering of Jesus which takes place on the day of preparation before the Sabbath. After his death, Joseph of Arimathea arrives, retrieves the body of Jesus, wraps it up, and brings it to his tomb. The body needs to be buried quickly because the Sabbath is approaching. Jesus is then buried to bear the curse due to sin. He has taken our judgment and uncleanness upon himself, what does the text reveal? After his burial, Luke tells us that "On the Sabbath day, they rested according to the commandment." This day was not a Sabbath of blessing for him, but a Sabbath of judgment, precisely as prophesied in Leviticus 26:6 and 2 Chronicles 36. Jesus experienced that cursed death anticipated in the Sabbath of judgment.

However, on the first day of the week, when the rest of death was concluded, Jesus emerged, restored in resurrection and bestowed with life. Leviticus 25 directs our attention to this reality, which, indeed, holds more significance than merely summarizing principles of good farming. It directs us back to the beginning, emphasizing how all of Creation was working towards the ultimate purpose of ushering in God's final Sabbath rest. It serves as a reminder of the unfaithfulness and sin of the Israelites, leading to their expulsion, but it also points us to Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. He entered this world, weary, famished, and burdened with our sins, yet emerged victorious in eternal life.

Let us then give thanks for Jesus, who fulfilled the Sabbath of judgment predicted by the prophets and the books of Moses. Through faith in him, we enter into his God's final rest. Let us truly cease from our sinful works throughout our lives, placing our trust not in ourselves to provide for our earthly or heavenly needs--for our sustenance in this world or for eternal life. Instead, let us find rest in Christ, eagerly awaiting the day when we will fully enter into the rest he has secured for us.

#25-B - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 25:8-55

Some events are special enough to be repeated. In our country, we have national holidays that repeat once a year. I think the two most popular days are Christmas and Independence Day. On a personal level, we also celebrate anniversaries and birthdays once a year.

Sometimes something so significant it occurs only once in a lifetime. Some of you may remember the last time Halley's Comet passed by the earth, which only occurs (roughly) every 75 years. A 50th wedding anniversary is a similar once-in-a-lifetime event that is specially marked with a celebratory day..

The Jews also had their yearly feasts which commemorated God's past redemptive work, and also pointed forward to the future work of Christ. In addition to the yearly feasts there was another even greater even that took place only once in the lifetime of every Israelite: the Year of Jubilee.

We will discuss the significance of this year under three headings. First, we'll explore how the year of Jubilee points to God's ultimate culmination of his work the final state in heaven. Secondly, we will examine the three key elements of Jubilee's celebration: the restitution of property, liberation from servitude, and the Sabbath rest from agricultural labor. Lastly, we should recognize the spiritual significance of these elements through its fulfillment in Christ.

Let's examine the first point, which is quite concise but significant. It emphasizes how the day of Jubilee serves as a sign pointing towards a greater fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. To determine the year of Jubilee, a simple calculation is required. We are to count seven weeks of years, which amounts to 49. The number seven holds immense significance in the Scripture, representing the ideas of fullness and completion. Just as God rested on the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath signifies the culmination and fulfillment of God's works and plan.

In Leviticus 25, the concept of the Sabbath extends beyond a single week to a Sabbath of Sabbaths, denoted by 7×7 , totaling 49 years. Additionally, the Jubilee year commences on or around the Day of Atonement, a time of reflection and fasting for the Israelites, as they contemplated their sins and the sacrificial offering made by the high priest on behalf of the nation. On this momentous day, the fasting transforms into a festive celebration, symbolizing the joy and new life that emerges from the sacrifice made. This parallel resonates with the atonement and death of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the name of the feast, translated as Jubilee, directly refers to the sound of the ram's horn trumpet, which was blown to announce its beginning. This trumpet blast signifies the coming of God as a judge, liberating and rescuing His people from bondage. It is reminiscent of the biblical depiction of the second coming, where the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and liberation from death will be achieved through Christ, God's mighty warrior. These seemingly simple elements in the passage clearly indicate a forthcoming culmination of blessings in the year of Jubilee, which erases past events and restores individuals to a state of rest and refreshment, exemplifying God's provision for His people.

Secondly, let us look at the three distinct elements of the Jubilee year: restitution of property, manumission from slavery, and sabbath rest. We only have space to briefly summarize each point in this devotional.

First, the year of Jubilee was clearly marked by the restitution of property. A fundamental principle was established in verse 23, stating that the land could not be sold permanently. Instead, any sale was to be treated as a "rental agreement" with God asserting His ultimate ownership over the land. The Israelites were viewed as temporary residents. This emphasized the notion that their ultimate inheritance was not the earthly land but the heavenly realm. If a piece of property was sold, it was essentially a transfer of crop rights rather than permanent land ownership. The price of the land would vary based on its proximity to the year of Jubilee, as it would eventually return to the original clan. Similar principles apply to the selling of houses and the possession of land by the Levites.

The second aspect of the year of Jubilee was its significance as a year of liberty and freedom. It is important to note that while the Old Testament acknowledges and regulates slavery, it does not present it as an ideal condition. Instead, it points towards the idea that slavery is not the ideal state for any individual or society. Insofar as slavery involved great misery for mankind, the OT contained many laws

that served to regulate and mitigate its sinful effects. Just as an ancient form of no-fault divorce was regulated (but not endorsed) in the law of Moses, so also slavery The year of Jubilee provided a mechanism for the release of those in servitude, granting them freedom and a fresh start.

Lastly, the year of Jubilee offered a reprieve from the usual agricultural activities. Instead of engaging in the usual processes of farming and storing crops for economic gain, the Israelites were instructed to rely on the land's natural abundance for sustenance throughout the year.

Nevertheless, we need to keep in mind that, like all the other feast days, this day is ultimately spiritual. That's the third and final point. How do we see that? Well, first of all, let's consider the restitution of property. How does that point us to the spiritual significance of this, especially in Jesus? We're told that the land shall not be sold in perpetuity because it symbolizes the permanence of our heavenly possession with Christ. And of course, when we come to the days of the apostles in the Book of Acts, we see a sign that the fulfillment of that has come in Jesus when He ascends into heaven. Let's look at Acts Chapter 4. What do we read in that passage? It's a detail that's very easy to miss, but if you look at verses 36 to 37, we read about many who were owners of lands or houses. What did they do? They sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles. Notably, Joseph, also called Barnabas by the Apostles, a Levite native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money, laying it at the apostles' feet. Why does it emphasize that he's a Levite? Well, what are the Levites not supposed to do with that land? They are not supposed to sell it in perpetuity and give the money away. But Barnabas does that. Why? Because he knows that in Christ, his true possession and inheritance have come, just as God told the Israelites in chapter 25, verses 23 to 24, that they were sojourners with Him and that He was their inheritance. So, the restitution of property directs us to our restoration to the heavenly land above in Christ.

The liberation proclaimed here from servitude ultimately points us to the freedom we have in Christ from slavery and servitude to sin. When we look at Jesus' first recorded sermon in the Gospel of Luke, we find the dramatic scene in Luke 4 where Jesus goes into the synagogue, takes the scroll of the prophet Isaiah on a Sabbath day, unrolls it, and stands up to read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." What was Isaiah referring to in that passage? It was the year of Jubilee--the year of liberty to the captives. But captivity to what? Not just earthly servitude, but ultimately our slavery and servitude to sin. As the letter to the Galatians tells us, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free, not as a cloak for bondage but to declare that the reign of the flesh over us has been broken.

Thirdly, this year of Jubilee points us to a time when there will not just be a temporary Sabbath one day in seven, but a perpetual Sabbath. When the scripture describes heaven, it portrays it as a place of abundance, with a tree of life whose leaves bring healing to the nations and whose fruit grants eternal life. In heaven, we will experience the rest of Jubilee, where we will cease from our work and find eternal rest in the Lord Jesus.

That's why Revelation 14:13 declares: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them." You see, ultimately, this year of Jubilee for the land of Israel points us to the great Jubilee in the land of Heaven. It will be marked one day when the final trumpet sounds, when the dead are raised, and when we are fully and finally freed from our sin and misery. It will take place, and we will find rest in our permanent possession in heaven above.

Let us thank God for this wonderful hope and expectation set before us in types and shadows. The spiritual fulfillment of this year has come, and the trumpet sound of its coming has gone forth to the world and reached our unworthy ears. May we continually renew our faith in this good news, dying more and more to sin and living in freedom from its enslaving chains, until we attain the fullness of that rest in the heavenly land above.

#26-A - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 26:1-13

Parents, I have a question for you! Should children be rewarded with payment for doing their chores, or should they simply be taught to do them based on a sense of obligation and responsibility?

Some parents argue that when children do their chores, it should be simply considered their responsibility and a way to demonstrate respect and appreciation for their parents. They believe that chores should not be rewarded with money or treats but should instead be expected as part of their familial duty.

On the other hand, there are families that offer payment and rewards for chores. While some chores may not meet the parents' expectations, these families strive to motivate their children to complete their tasks by providing modest payments. Perhaps they pay their pre-teen son 5 dollars for mowing the lawn. Maybe they promise a trip to the ice cream store when their daughters help clean the kitchen. They seek to find ways to encourage their children's engagement with chores.

As for my own perspective, I find value in both sides of the debate, depending on the circumstances. Each position holds some truth within it. On one hand, the Bible instructs us to willingly obey and serve God without expecting rewards. It reminds us that everything we have and are is a gift from God. However, when we explore the Scriptures, we also find instances where God rewards obedience, even when it is imperfect and marred by sin. He offers these rewards to draw us closer to Him. How to approach both principles and when to apply them to our children requires wisdom.

In Leviticus 26, we encounter this principle of blessings promised to obedience. This topic can be perplexing and challenging, especially for Reformed Protestants like ourselves, who believe in justification by faith alone. It is crucial to understand that the call to obey God and the promise of rewards for obedience do not contradict the principle of justification by faith alone. Justification is solely through faith, but genuine faith that embraces Christ inevitably leads to good works as an expression of gratitude.

As we delve into the concept of obedience and blessing, we will examine it through three primary lenses outlined in the passage. Firstly, we will explore obedience and blessing in relation to works and grace. Secondly, we will analyze how obedience and blessing are intertwined within God's covenant relationship with His people. Finally, we will observe the connection between obedience and blessing in the context of the land of Israel, which symbolized the people of God in ancient times.

We will only consider the first point in this devotional, and return to the other two in the following days.

Let's consider the first point regarding obedience and blessing in relation to works and grace. Some point to the conditional structure of the statements found in verses 3 and 4, which follow an "if-then" pattern.

Grammatically speaking, this is a conditional statement, where if X happens, then Y will follow. Essentially it is saying: "If you obey me, I will reward you."

These interpreters understand the conditional relationship between obedience and blessing as one of meritorious works. In other words, they view the keeping of statutes, observing commandments, and performing good works described in verse 3 as the grounds, basis, or meritorious condition that compels or prompts God to bring about the reward. This perspective is sometimes referred to as a "covenant of works" in theological discussions. It is important to note that this view aligns with the understanding held by the Roman Catholic Church, where fulfilling the condition leads to the earning or merit of salvation and eternal life, both for OT and NT believers.

However, it is crucial to clarify that while Roman Catholics introduce the concept of merit for salvation, there are others who see a principle of merit in this passage do not hold to salvation by works. Some argue that this "covenant of works" is just a hypothetical proposal: "Go ahead and try to obey me. I would reward you if you do, but you won't be able to do it." Still others limit the application to the earthly blessings promised in the OT. While salvation cannot be earned by merit, certain earthly blessings can. While these positions are not the same, they have in common that they see a notion of merit within the structure of God's covenant relationship with Israel. Although they may clearly affirm salvation by faith alone through grace alone, their recognition of meritorious works in this passage remains a serious error.

Now, let's approach this from a practical standpoint and consider how it applies to our lives. Have you ever found yourself confused when reading a passage of Scripture that emphasizes the call to obey God? Perhaps you wondered how such a call to "good works" can fit with the Gospel promise that we are justified by faith. How can we zealously obey God without falling into the trap of justification by works?

When we talk about meritorious works, the concept is described in Romans 4:4-5. In this passage, the apostle Paul explains that wages are not credited as a gift but are owed to the one who works. However, for the one who does not work but trusts in God, who justifies the ungodly, their faith is counted as righteousness. Here we find the notion that works are performed as wages that are owed. Now, when we consider this idea of God owing someone something, there are only two instances in the history of the world where this is even remotely possible. First and foremost, it applies to Christ, who merited our salvation through His perfect righteousness as the eternal God. Likewise, we can speak of Adam in the garden, who had the potential to achieve a certain merit through God's condescension and covenant with him. However, apart from these exceptional cases, the Bible is abundantly clear that there can be no meritorious works for sinners whatsoever.

Therefore, when we read Leviticus 26, we need to completely eliminate any notion that it promotes a works-based religion. We must rid our minds of the idea that by obeying in our own strength, we can earn something from God. We cannot earn anything from Him, not the houses we live in, the water we drink, or even the next breath we take, as all of it is a gift from God. In fact, if we perceive merit in this passage based on its conditional "if-then" structure, we would also need to argue, for the sake of consistency, that there is merit in the NT as well. However, we know that is not true at all. For instance, in Galatians 6, Paul discusses the connection between sowing and reaping, obedience and disobedience, and their respective consequences. He explains that those who sow to their own flesh will reap corruption, while those who sow to the Spirit will reap eternal life. Furthermore, he encourages believers not to grow weary of doing good, for they will reap a reward if they do not give up. This passage has an

"if-then" conditional structure, but it is absolutely clear from the letter that there is no merit in the life of a sinner. Here, the apostle clarifies that the reward of eternal life results from a life of sanctification, which stems not from our own power but from the Holy Spirit.

#26-B - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 26:1-13

Yesterday we considered the first aspect of this passage, that the rewards promised in Leviticus 26 are not earned or given according to merit. Although there is an "if-then" structure to God's promises, the rewards are not earned. They are gifts of grace.

Today we examine the second point of our meditations, in which we will think about how God's promises regarding obedience and blessings come to us in the context of the covenant.

What we read in Leviticus 26 (and similar OT passages) are not bare commandments or promises. They are commandments and promises that emerge within the context of God's covenantal relationship with His people. Let's clarify the meaning of "relationship" here. In Christian teaching, some people view it as an informal connection devoid of any legal structure, solely based on emotional love. You might hear it stated that God's relationship with us is a covenant, not a contract. However, it is important to understand that while the covenant does involve an emotional, loving communion, it also has a formal, legal aspect. To claim it is a contract and not a covenant is a false dichotomy at its core. This relationship is characterized by love, communion, and fellowship, to which God assigns a legal structure.

To illustrate this, let's consider the institution of marriage. Is marriage merely a contract? By no means. It encompasses a deep, profound love and affection between two individuals, a man and a woman. Throughout generations, humans have celebrated the love and covenant inherent in marriage, expressed in heartfelt emotional terms. However, marriage also carries a legal dimension. When we enter into marriage, we make vows and promises that are formally and legally binding. In fact, we take these vows because we value the loving fellowship and communion at the heart of the covenant. Far from being contradictory, these two aspects harmoniously coexist.

As we examine God's call to obey, to walk in His statutes, to observe His commandments, we discover that they originate from the covenantal nature of God's relationship with His people. How do we perceive this in the passage?

Let's explore three specific aspects.

First, in this passage, we encounter a clear scriptural expression of the central idea underlying the covenant. In verse 12, God declares, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." This verse encapsulates the essence of being in a covenant relationship with God. It involves a bond of love and mutual faithfulness between God and man. It signifies more than God claiming ownership of us as His people, treating us as mere possessions. It also encompasses our taking ownership and possession of God. Indeed, God declares, "I will be your God," and our response is, "You will be our people." This mutual possession, interconnectedness, fellowship, love, and communion lie at the heart of the covenant.

In summary, those two phrases encapsulate the essence of the covenant. When God says, "I will be your God," it means that as our God, He will provide everything we require to serve and love Him. It also signifies our commitment to devote all that we are and have in response to His gracious calling, drawing

us to Himself through obedience and love. This dedication does not stem from a desire to earn or gain anything from God, but rather from our profound love and gratitude toward Him. This is the calling God extends to His people. Although there are commands to obey and remember the covenant, these imperatives flow out of the communion of love and fellowship that God shares with us, His people.

This holds tremendous significance because God has liberated us from slavery, and our life with Him is one of freedom. We are members of His family. If we fail to view the call to obey within the context of this loving fellowship and relationship we have with God, we might be tempted to perceive it as a burdensome obligation that we wish to escape. No sinner with a sinful heart desires to be told what to do. However, when we acknowledge that the God who calls us to obey, love, and serve Him is the same God who has loved us and selflessly served us through Christ, who became our servant and Redeemer, our understanding of obedience undergoes a radical transformation.

Secondly, we also perceive this covenantal character of the passage in another remarkable and exquisite expression. In verse 12 God states: "And I will walk among you." This statement holds immense significance. Imagine a husband and wife strolling together on a beautiful evening, venturing outside to appreciate God's creation and engage in heartfelt conversation. On a broader scale, walking here serves as a metaphor for being united in every aspect of our lives. We not only share this experience with human friends, but God Himself declares that He will be with us in this manner. We will be intertwined and interconnected with Him throughout the journey of life. It echoes the truth of God walking with Adam and Eve in the garden during the cool of the day. It also brings to mind the language used to describe Jesus as He dwelt among His disciples and pitched His tent among them, fostering a sense of closeness. Moreover, it points us towards the future consummation, where God will be present, walking among us as our God, and we will behold Him through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This fellowship within the covenant entails mutual journeying together, and the Lord's call to obedience stems from this relationship. It resembles two friends walking side by side on a road, where one cares for the other and offers encouragement out of love and service. Their words carry weight and power due to the friendship shared between them. The same applies to our relationship with the Lord.

The third aspect we must acknowledge about this covenantal dynamic, building upon the earlier points, is that it involves God's enabling grace to help us obey. While God commands us in Scripture, He also bestows upon us the grace to fulfill what He asks of us. You may be familiar with the passage written by Paul, where he assures that God will never give us a burden beyond what we can bear, for He promises to grant us the grace to endure it (. As we examine the passage, we observe that God's covenantal grace lies at the core and foundation of the call to obedience. How is this evident? Let us examine the specific ways it describes God's active and direct role in facilitating obedience by his grace.

Firstly, take note of verse 13, where it declares, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt." These very words are in the preface to the Ten Commandments. Before God instructs us on anything, He reminds us that He has already accomplished everything necessary for our obedience. He liberated us from Egypt; He acted and worked mightily on our behalf. Subsequently, He calls us to respond with our own acts and works of obedience. In other words, the "indicative" of what God has done precedes the "imperative" of what He commands us to do. [A helpful way to remember the difference between these is that an "indicative" indicates a state of being while an "imperative" gives us a command]. Yet, it is more than God initiating the process and letting it unfold on its own. Observe what else is expressed in verse 13: "I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect." God is directly involved at every point, providing the empowering grace His people need to faithfully follow Him.

To delve deeper into the theological aspect of sanctification and good works, every good work we undertake not only requires the grace God has previously bestowed but also necessitates the direct influence of His Holy Spirit within us. It is the Spirit of life, the Spirit of resurrection, enabling us to walk in His ways. The key emphasis here is on God's sovereign grace at every juncture from beginning to end. His grace regenerates us, sanctifies us, and empowers us to engage in every good work. Furthermore, His grace will ultimately reward us for our obedience.

It is crucial for us to comprehend what God is calling Israel to within this covenantal relationship. If we do, our perspective shifts from perceiving it as a demand for slavish obedience, where someone simply dictates our actions throughout the day like an unlikable boss. Instead, we recognize it as an invitation from the Lord who loves us, gave Himself for us, and demonstrated the extraordinary lengths He would go to save us.

But there is another aspect of God's covenant relationship expressed here, and it pertains to the specific commands given in relation to worship. In 26:1-2, the Israelites are reminded not to engage in idolatry, to erect pillars, or set up carved images. Additionally, they are instructed to observe God's Sabbath and show reverence for His sanctuary. This specific commandment holds great significance as it directly addresses and flows from the covenant relationship between Israel and God, particularly within the context of worship. It is in the sanctuary, as they gather for worship, that they cease from their earthly labors, bow down before the one true and living God, and turn away from lifeless idols. This act of worship is where the covenant fellowship between God and humanity is consummated. God draws near to them through His word and, in the Old Testament, through types and shadows, while they draw near to Him in prayer and devotion.

Therefore, the blessing that God extends through these commandments is not solely for obedience in and of itself, detached from everything else. It is a blessing for obedience that arises as the fruit and outcome of a vibrant communion of love and faithfulness between God and His people. Indeed, it is a living communion of love and faithfulness between Christ and His people. He is the vine, and we are the branches. It is through this covenant fellowship with Him that we bear fruit and receive our reward.

As Christians, we are in covenant fellowship with Triune God. His call to obey may at first "feel" oppressive or domineering. But this is just the reaction of our flesh to deceive us from walking with God and delighting in communion with him. He has freed us from our sins with his precious blood. He has taken us to himself and we have become his. He has made the church his bride and in love received us to himself. His commandments are outflows of grace to steer us away from sin and to guide us on the path to heaven.

#26-C - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 26:1-13

Today we consider the third part of our meditation on this passage. We first saw how the rewards promised to Israel's obedience are not meritorious before God. Second, we considered how the command to obey flowed out of the loving and gracious covenantal fellowship between God and his people.

Finally, as we delve into the passage, it is crucial to carefully examine the connection between obedience and blessing in Israel's life in the land. Verses 4-5 emphasize the fruitfulness of the land in its yield of crops. In verses 5-8, we read of the security they will enjoy in the land from their enemies or even the

beasts. In verse 9 we read of the fruitfulness of the people in becoming a numerous nation. The blessings are clearly manifested in and connected to their lives in an earthly land.

Now, let's briefly address whether we should expect similar blessings today. We must approach this question from two different perspectives. Firstly, should we expect these blessings directly, as if God's bestowal of land blessings applies in exactly the same way today? No, we should not. Expecting such blessings in a literal sense leads us into the trap of the prosperity gospel, where it is believed that merely having strong enough faith will result in God granting every conceivable blessing. If we trust God enough, he will provide us with the car we want, a full bank account, etc. This is clearly false and a distortion of the Gospel. The blessings of the land were a temporary typology that pointed them to the path to heaven. Through God's gracious cleansing and atoning grace, they were enabled to follow God in a life of thankful obedience. God blessed that sincere, albeit imperfect obedience with the fruit of the land. He did so to remind them of his favor towards them and also a pledge of the permanent blessings of heaven to come. This temporary, typological arrangement has passed away in Christ. When he passed into heaven, the special arrangement connecting obedience to land-blessing in Palestine passed away.

Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that in a general sense, God, in His providence, tends to bless a life that avoids sin and follows the path of righteousness. The Proverbs are filled with statements to this effect which seem broader in scope than the typological arrangement with Israel. Likewise, Jesus tells us to pray for our daily bread and tells us not to worry about our earthly needs. He even encourages us that if we leave all to follow him we will receive it back (with persecutions) both in this life and in the life to come (Mark 10:30). The Christian life is not devoid of blessing or reward. To be sure it has a more Spiritual focus, but it is not without physical manifestation.

However, this differs from the specific blessings bestowed upon Israel. Why is that? In the New Testament, and even indicated in the Old Testament, the land of Israel and its blessings ultimately represent a type and picture of heaven itself. Hebrews 11:10 tells us that the Patriarchs were looking forward to a heavenly city. In 13:14 it underscores that here we have no lasting city, but we seek one that is to come. The land pointed to heaven.

In the book of Revelation, we see a spiritual fulfillment of the promised blessings in Leviticus. There we see the complete absence of our true enemies at the end of all things: sin, the flesh, and the devil. The devil, who reigns over the spiritual military might and the powers of darkness against us, meets his ultimate fate in being cast forever into the Lake of Fire. As for the fruitfulness of that place, we encounter the tree of life that bears its fruit unceasingly, and its leaves bring healing to the nations. Ultimately, the fruitfulness of the land described here points us to heaven. In that heavenly realm, we have access to the tree of life, which offers us the fountain and assurance of eternal life in Christ.

By putting all these aspects together, we come to realize that God's ultimate promise to us for a life of sanctification, not based on our own merit, but as a result of His grace, is the infinite gift of eternal life. Remember the verse we read in Galatians 6: those who so to the Spirit will also reap from the Spirit--not just earthly blessings, but eternal life.

The fact that these rewards and promises are portrayed as pictures of heaven itself is the strongest evidence that they are not to be understood as earned through our sinful, impure works. How could we ever imagine that our finite, imperfect efforts could earn us heaven or the favor of God? It is only by the

wonderful and gracious drawing of the Lord that we are able to serve Him with the assurance of His blessing and obedience.

Now, practically speaking, how does this knowledge help us? Well, once again, Galatians 6 emphasizes the reality that we will reap in due season if we do not give up. The Christian life, especially after we embark on our journey, can be long and arduous. While it is filled with many joys and pleasures, we must not underestimate the weariness and fatigue that can often overtake us. This is true for all believers, whether they have been Christians for a long time or are newly converted, whether they are pastors leading the church or members of the congregation. The Christian life is a call to take up our cross, die to self, and live for God. This task can be immensely tiring.

Yet, what a comfort and encouragement it is to know that God desires to help us and has laid out before us, though He is under no obligation to do so, our reward for a life of service to Him. Although He graciously blesses us, both spiritually and materially, to remind us of His favor and love as His children, the only lasting fruit and true peace from the daily onslaught of our enemies can be found in our unbreakable fellowship and communion with God, which we will fully experience in Christ in the heavenly realms. In times of weariness and stress, let us remember the Lord's gracious promise that He will not forget our works, our lives, or our love for Him. He will one day usher in that glorious day with showers of blessings and joy when we dwell with Him in heaven forever.

#26-A - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 26:14-46

Parents often face a dilemma when it comes to disciplining their children. Should they immediately discipline them for their actions, or should they exercise patience and show them grace? This is a challenging decision to make and can vary from child to child and at different stages of development. It requires wisdom and prayer to discern the appropriate time to move from verbal warnings or instructions to physical discipline. Scripture clearly tells us that sparing the rod indicates a lack of love for our children, emphasizing the importance of discipline. However, it is crucial to exercise discretion, restraint, and love when disciplining our children, never doing it while manifesting anger and avoiding any form of abuse.

As a parent, you may have encountered situations where the day has been long and difficult, with both your children and yourself feeling strained. Despite speaking to them repeatedly about what they should and should not do, it feels as if your voice holds little power. This can be a dilemma for parents since ultimately, we want our children to heed our words and, as they grow into adults, to listen to the voice of God willingly, not merely out of fear of discipline. We desire them to understand how to please the Lord and bring Him joy. However, if our younger children are not responsive and attentive, we occasionally need to remind them that there are consequences behind our words. At times, we must reestablish our parental authority by backing our words with appropriate discipline. Determining when and how to implement discipline can be challenging.

In the passage before us, the people of Israel are compared to children under the OT period, and God set forth a method of spiritual discipline to teach them how to walk in His ways. This passage serves as a warning against turning away from the living God, highlighting the punishment or judgment that awaits those who refuse to repent. Doctrinally speaking, when we encounter such passages, they are often referred to as "warnings" of Scripture. As believers, we face a dilemma when confronted with such passages, as they present the possibility of apostasy and the consequences that would follow if we were to turn away from God.

Here lies the crux of the dilemma: If God's Holy Spirit assures me that I am one of God's chosen people and I have full and final salvation through the complete and final work of Christ, the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit to transform me, and the assurance that I can never fall due to the efficacy of Christ's intercession, why should I pay attention to these passages and warnings of Scripture? In other words, if I am chosen by God, why should I be concerned about the possibility of falling away or turning from God?

In this devotional, we will lay down some foundational theological principles to address this very question. Before we can rightly apply these passages to our lives today, we have to attain some theological clarity. We will explore the passage and use three crucial distinctions or categories as a framework to answer the question.

There are three points to make:

First, we need to differentiate between God's will as expressed in His commandments (the will of precept) and His eternal plan (the will of decree). Second, we must distinguish between God's purpose for the elect and the church and His purpose for the non-elect. Finally, we need to see how this passage relates to the revelation of God's justice, both in our sinful state and in Christ's redemptive work. These three points will provide a foundation for addressing the question at hand.

First, let us get a better grasp the distinction between the will of precept and the will of decree.

God's will of precept is His law, His commandments, and His definition of right and wrong. The will of precept is rooted in His commandments. The will of decree has to do with what God ordained in his eternal plan.

Leviticus 26 largely outlines God's will of precept, emphasizing the importance of following his commandments while also outlining the corresponding sanctions or punishments for disobedience. Additionally, we recognize another aspect of God's will referred to as the will of decree. This pertains to His eternal plan, which He established from the beginning of time. It encompasses what God has determined will come to pass.

So, why is this distinction between God's commandments and His plan (the will of precept and the will of decree) crucial? The Scriptures sometimes present these two aspects differently than we might expect. To illustrate this point, let's consider the crucifixion of Christ. This passage directs us to the punishment that Christ had to endure for our disobedience. From the perspective of the will of precept, the crucifixion of Christ contradicted God's law. Those who crucified Him were transgressing God's commandments and acting as lawless individuals, as stated in Acts 2. However, from the standpoint of the will of decree, God had decreed and appointed that the Son of God would be crucified and die on the cross. While it contradicted His will of precept (for which they were held accountable), the event fell out according to his decree and perfect plan.

Understanding this distinction and recognizing that these two aspects can sometimes diverge allows us to see how they coexist harmoniously. There is no contradiction within God nor between these two aspects of his will. Legitimately, we can discuss God's will in different senses, including when examining the crucifixion of Christ. This understanding is important because it helps us grasp the multiple ends or purposes God might have in revealing His commandments to us. For example, the people who crucified Jesus were given the commandment "You shall not kill" through God's word. However, God did not give

them this commandment so that they would turn from their sinful ways and refrain from killing Jesus, as that was intended to happen. Instead, it was to store up evidence against them and make it clear that God's judgment would be upon them, leaving them without excuse. Although the warning was not heeded, the declaration of the commandment still carried meaning.

As Christians, we often think that if we have faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we come across a passage like Leviticus 26, we might conclude that since these punishments won't befall us, we need not pay attention to it. We may feel inclined to switch off and disregard the warnings and threats starting from verse 14, comfortably reclining in our spiritual easy chairs, convinced that God's decree ensures these consequences won't apply to us. However, we must remember that there is more to consider beyond the will of decree; there is the will of precept. God gives us commandments and warnings for various reasons. Even if we are certain that these punishments won't befall us, we must recognize that God may have other purposes in mind.

But there's a second thing aspect we need to consider to fully grasp God's purpose in these "warnings." It involves distinguishing how this verse applies to God's elect versus the non-elect. In Romans 9 Paul speaks of two Israels coexisting in one nation. There was a physical Israel and a spiritual Israel. The former was simply physically born into the nation, while the latter was born of the Spirit. The ultimate distinction between the two was determined by the doctrine of election. God loved Jacob and hated Esau. He showed mercy and compassion according to His own will, not based on human efforts or desires. The doctrine of election gives us a framework for how this passage can be applied differently to the elect and non-elect.

God speaks a single word with the same message but with a dual purpose: one for those who will listen, obey, and be saved, and another for those who will not. This dual purpose is evident when we examine the conditional form in which these warnings are presented. If you look at verse 14, you'll notice the word "if." Conditional statements usually include an "if" and a "then" clause. These threatenings are not absolute, as if they will definitely come upon everyone. They are presented conditionally because Moses is addressing a mixed group comprising true believers (part of the Invisible Church) and external professors (part of the visible church but not truly elect).

For those He intends to save, the warnings serve as a call to repentance and a means to bring them closer to Him. For those whom He does not wish to save, the purpose is to provide a preview of eternal judgment. Now, you might initially find the warnings in Leviticus 26 or the corresponding passage in Deuteronomy harsh when reading them during your devotions. You may think, "I thought God was gracious." Indeed, God is gracious, and His grace is evident throughout this passage. We will explore the theme of God's grace in judgment in a future sermon. For now, let's briefly note the numerous opportunities given for repentance. In verse 14, God says, "If you won't listen to me and spurn my statutes, then all these judgments will come." In verse 21, He states, "If you walk contrary to me and will not listen, I'll continue striking you." And in verse 23, He says, "If, despite the discipline, you remain contrary to me..." Notice how He combines discipline with an opportunity to repent. He tempers His judgment with grace because there is an elect remnant among the people, and He grants them time for salvation. On the other hand, for those whom He does not intend to save, as we mentioned earlier, the purpose of these warnings is to give them a glimpse of eternal judgment.

Now it is certainly true that there is a greater measure of grace and sweetness in the proclamation of the New Testament. However, I challenge you to read through the preaching of Jesus, especially the warnings he gives to the Jewish people who refuse to believe in him about eternal punishment to come.

He speaks of it as a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. The Scripture refers to it as a lake of fire, burning with sulfur that can never be extinguished.

However, this is not the case for the elect. Those who are chosen by God, redeemed by Him, and called in time have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. The Spirit of adoption testifies in their hearts that they are children of God. The same warnings and miseries experienced in this life are given to the elect for a different purpose. This is the glory of the Gospel and of Christ. He turns all our sufferings into a time of testing and discipline, not to preview a judgment that will condemn us, but to refine us and cause us to grow. The purpose of God for the elect is ultimately good, as He works all things for their good.

Now, how does this apply specifically to us today in the church? One aspect is seen in the practice of church discipline. In the NT era, church discipline is fundamentally restorative in nature. Although people may fear being publicly confronted or "shamed" about their shortcomings, it is important to remember that all of us have areas in our lives that need God's grace and the help of the church community. The sentence of judgment has been removed, and we should not fear the revelation of our sins and shortcomings. Confession often leads to support and encouragement from others who can relate to our struggles. Perfect love casts out the fear of judgment because of the word of Christ. However, if church discipline becomes necessary, its purpose is restorative. For example, in 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul instructs the church to deliver a man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, with the ultimate goal of saving his spirit on the day of the Lord.

An excellent illustration of God's purpose in discipline is found in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The prodigal son squandered his inheritance and ended up in a desperate situation, longing to eat the food of pigs. This misery was necessary for him to come to his senses and repent. Similarly, the warnings and judgments experienced by God's people, including church discipline, have the purpose of bringing us to salvation, and breaking our hearts' bondage to the deceitfulness of sin. God understands our sinful hearts and knows how easily we can go astray, just as Israel quickly returned to the bondage of idolatry.

Finally, as we consider how this verse can apply to us, we need to focus more directly on us as believers today. Understanding that if we are the elect of God, these things won't come upon us as we trust in the Lord. However, it's crucial for us to hear and heed them. They reveal the perfect justice of God from which we've been saved. There are two simple reasons why we need to pay attention.

First, they show us what our sins truly deserve. We cannot fully appreciate the gift of grace until we have a genuine realization of what that grace saves us from. If someone forgives a small debt, we might rejoice in it. For instance, if a friend pays for your lunch and later tells you not to worry about repaying the \$5, you might think, "Hey, \$5. I can use that for a movie or coffee." But imagine if you owed \$1,000,000, and someone came to you and said, "I'll pay off your \$1,000,000 debt." That would be astonishing. If you earned \$50,000 a year after taxes, it would take you 20 years to pay off that debt. To the extent that we fully comprehend what we've been saved from, we will have a greater appreciation for what we have been saved to. This is where the warnings play a crucial role. When we hear them, feel their weight, and tremble at their severity, we can acknowledge that our sins deserve such consequences. Our Christian faith and salvation are not entitlements or rewards for being inherently good. They are gifts of grace because God deals with us according to His mercy, not His perfect justice. Furthermore, these warnings help us recognize the grave danger our sins pose to us. As we examine our sins and consider what they deserve, these warnings enable us to have a deeper appreciation for God's grace in Christ.

Secondly, these warning passages reveal the magnitude of what Christ endured for us. As we read the passage and reflect on the great terrors that befell the people, we can't help but think of the agony Jesus experienced on the cross when the full wrath of God was poured out upon Him. We can envision Jesus being hungry, thirsty, and famished on the cross, mirroring the threat of famine mentioned in the passage. The text speaks of the death of the sons and daughters of the people as part of the judgment, and on the cross, Jesus, the Son of God, faced death. When God came to devastate the land, we witnessed the sun turning dark and the ground trembling, reminiscent of the terrible events mentioned in the warning passage. Moreover, as we contemplate the horrors that Israel faced in punishment and judgment, we can also see what Jesus endured. He was cut off from the land of the living, and as the text states, his enemies overtook him, even though he was the righteous one who deserved blessings and victory. That victory was stripped away from Him. Though He was entitled to perfect righteousness, as mentioned in verse 21, He endured sevenfold judgment, not for His own sins, but for ours.

These warning passages are not irrelevant to us; they offer crucial insights. They not only help us comprehend the various ways in which God works out His plan in our lives but also serve as a warning to resist the temptation to engage in sin which leads to death. Moreover, they enable us to perceive the magnificence of God's forgiving grace. He has forgiven us for our sins and exhibited immense love by bearing the equivalent judgment of hell on the cross. This liberation from eternal punishment grants us everlasting life in Him. While we can be assured that we have been fully and finally freed from sin and death in Jesus, the warnings serve as a reminder of what our sins truly deserve that we might grow in thankfulness to Jesus and dedicate our lives fully to him.

#26-B - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 26:14-46

Of all the chapters in the Bible, Leviticus 26 ranks among the most sobering. It depicts the horrifying consequences that befell Israel, many of which were tragically realized in history. The detailed descriptions of these horrors are heart-wrenching and challenging to read. I won't delve extensively into the gruesome details, as I'm sure you felt the weight of them as you read the passage. In our previous meditation of Leviticus 26, we examined the theme of judgment and warning—why God presents it to us, how it fits into His plan, and why we must take these scriptural warnings to heart, even when we are assured of our eternal election and security.

The passage is filled with alarming warnings and threats of punishment against Israel for their sins but still reveals God's merciful and loving grace toward His people. Even amidst the severity of these prophecies, it is crucial for us to take these lessons to heart. Recognizing the magnitude of our own sins against God enables us to truly grasp the profound depths, heights, lengths, and breadth of His love for us. As Jesus articulated in the Gospel, those who have been forgiven much have a greater capacity to love Him and genuinely appreciate the incredible grace that God bestows on sinners like us.

These are the four aspects we observe.

First, we see God's grace in how these warnings serve as a deterrent against the hardness of the heart in their covenant relationship with God. In our previous study of Leviticus 26:1-13, we explored the blessings and rewards for obedience, which emanate from the covenantal dynamic or relationship between God and His people. God dwells among them, and there is a mutual communion and fellowship. This communion extends beyond mere outward ethical conformity to God's will. It involves a heart-to-heart and soul-to-soul connection—a deep bond of love and faithfulness. At the core of this covenantal grace is the fact that God draws near to us, and we are united in heart and love with Him.

Notice how they specifically target the heart of the matter—Israel's heart. Many of these passages directly address the heart of the Israelites. In verse 5 Moses speaks of how in their disobedience the soul comes to "abhor" God's commandments. Rebellion thus reveals a heart that hates God and his word. Verses 21-24 stand in contrast to verses 3 and 12. Earlier their relationship was described as a mutual "walk" in friendship and fellowship. Their rebellion is a betrayal of the heart of this friendship. If they walk contrary to God he will walk contrary to them. In verse 41 it also speaks of their disobedient and uncircumcised hearts. In directing their attention to the root of the matter, he is also pursuing a gracious restoration. He is not only addressing the symptom but the underlying disease. In this, we discern God's grace even in judgment.

Secondly, we see God's grace in judgment through how it functions as a means to restrain and limit their capacity to sin. Initially, one might perceive painful discipline as oppressive. For instance, consider the act of arresting someone and placing them in handcuffs to prevent harm to others. Although handcuffs are uncomfortable and restrict personal freedom, they serve a purpose in safeguarding righteousness and preventing harm. Similarly, the discipline imposed on Israel restricts their inclination to sin.

In some verses, emphasis is placed on the fact that God will shatter and destroy their idols. Many of these would have been made of gold and therefore quite powerful. But there is a deeper root to their idolatry that must be destroyed. Verse 19 reveals that the Lord intends to shatter the pride of their power. Pride, the root of all sin, manifests as self-reliance and a denial of God's necessity in their lives. By breaking their pride, God effectively curtails their motivation to sin against Him. Likewise, in verse 20, it is proclaimed that their strength will be futile. Although weakness is generally unwelcome, Israel's weakened state serves a dual purpose of limiting and terminating their sinful behavior. This limitation extends beyond their physical strength. In verse 30, it is evident that not only will their strength be diminished, but their physical idols, constructed with precious materials and great effort, will be destroyed. Initially, the shock and disappointment of losing their idols may arise, but there is a concealed grace in this act. The removal of idols serves to restrict their ability to engage in idolatry, a sin they often prioritize above God.

Although suffering loss and weakness are not pleasant, experiences of sickness, pain, and weakness draw us closer to the Lord. They redirect our focus and attention toward Him. God employs profound means to bring Israel to a state of weakness because only through humiliation can their hardened hearts be broken, ultimately leading to exaltation. Thus, this second aspect reveals the hidden grace within this judgment—namely, the limitation of their ability to sin.

But there's a third point to consider: the remarkable display of God's patience toward His people. In Romans 2:4, Paul speaks of the riches of God's kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead them to repentance. However, due to their hardened and unrepentant hearts, they accumulate wrath for themselves on the day of judgment. In essence, this delay in judgment reveals God's grace through the manifestation of His patience.

Another passage that echoes this same point is 2 Peter 3:9. It emphasizes that the Lord's apparent slowness in fulfilling His promises is actually an expression of His patience, as He desires that none should perish but all should come to repentance. Throughout history, God delays the rightful judgment that should befall people, demonstrating mercy and grace to allow time for repentance.

This can be likened to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Although they were told that they would surely die on the day they ate the forbidden fruit, they did not immediately die physically. Instead, they continued to live, have children, and, according to Scripture, believed in God's promise and found redemption through His grace. Similarly, in the case of Israel, we witness God's glorious and infinite patience with His chosen people. Despite the fact that even the smallest sin deserves judgment, God repeatedly delays His judgment, offering ample opportunity for repentance.

Verse 14 states that if Israel refuses to listen to God, discipline will be brought upon them. The subsequent verses (15-20) outline the discipline they will face. This pattern is repeated throughout the passage: Israel rebels, discipline ensues, and then God relents and provides an opportunity for repentance. The judgments become increasingly severe in response to the escalating hardness of Israel's heart. One might assume that, after so much patience, Israel's time for repentance has come to an end and judgment is imminent. By the time we reach verse 39, it may appear that there is no further opportunity for repentance, even if they were to seek God with tears. They have been scattered to the ends of the earth, the once glorious promised land reduced to desolation, and they suffer under the oppression of their enemies. It seems as though restoration is out of reach. Israel's sins were not small. The idolatry led to abhorrent abominations--even child sacrifice! Yet, despite all this, God's patience did not completely forsake them. Grace is expressed and hidden through the patience of God in imposing his judgments.

Finally, we also see God's grace in judgment in that this passage holds out the possibility of repentance and restoration. In verse 40, we witness a remarkable shift. Despite years of rebellion and increasing defiance against God, we see an opportunity for change. The pattern of judgment and punishment is broken. Instead of conditional statements like "if they rebel," we now have a glorious declaration of forgiveness and mercy: If Israel confesses their iniquity, humbles their hearts, and makes amends, God will not reject or destroy them. It is incredible that even after extensive rebellion, God holds out the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. This opportunity to repent is not earned through actions but granted to those who simply confess their sins. God's forgiveness is given when we acknowledge our wrongdoing, although this will be accompanied by the fruits of repentance and gratitude over time. God eagerly and delightfully receives those who repent and seeks to restore covenant fellowship with them. This passage demonstrates that the covenant made with Israel, as outlined in Leviticus, is fundamentally gracious, rooted in the covenant with Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. It is a covenant of grace, not of works, allowing for repentance and promising restoration. The ultimate proof of grace is seen in Jesus Christ, who bore the punishments for the sins of his people. Through him, we can have victory over sin and share in his righteousness. As we persevere in faith, we will receive crowns of victory, but if we turn away from true faith, the wrath of God awaits. We are grateful to be among those who believe and overcome through Christ's righteousness. Let us humbly live lives of faith and repentance, being always wary of the perils of a hard and disobedient heart.

#26-C - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 26:1-13

Today we consider the third part of our meditation on this passage. We first saw how the rewards promised to Israel's obedience are not meritorious before God. Second, we considered how the command to obey flowed out of the loving and gracious covenantal fellowship between God and his people.

Finally, as we delve into the passage, it is crucial to carefully examine the connection between obedience and blessing in Israel's life in the land. Verses 4-5 emphasize the fruitfulness of the land in its yield of

crops. In verses 5-8, we read of the security they will enjoy in the land from their enemies or even the beasts. In verse 9 we read of the fruitfulness of the people in becoming a numerous nation. The blessings are clearly manifested in and connected to their lives in an earthly land.

Now, let's briefly address whether we should expect similar blessings today. We must approach this question from two different perspectives. Firstly, should we expect these blessings directly, as if God's bestowal of land blessings applies in exactly the same way today? No, we should not. Expecting such blessings in a literal sense leads us into the trap of the prosperity gospel, where it is believed that merely having strong enough faith will result in God granting every conceivable blessing. If we trust God enough, he will provide us with the car we want, a full bank account, etc. This is clearly false and a distortion of the Gospel. The blessings of the land were a temporary typology that pointed them to the path to heaven. Through God's gracious cleansing and atoning grace, they were enabled to follow God in a life of thankful obedience. God blessed that sincere, albeit imperfect obedience with the fruit of the land. He did so to remind them of his favor towards them and also a pledge of the permanent blessings of heaven to come. This temporary, typological arrangement has passed away in Christ. When he passed into heaven, the special arrangement connecting obedience to land-blessing in Palestine passed away.

Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that in a general sense, God, in His providence, tends to bless a life that avoids sin and follows the path of righteousness. The Proverbs are filled with statements to this effect which seem broader in scope than the typological arrangement with Israel. Likewise, Jesus tells us to pray for our daily bread and tells us not to worry about our earthly needs. He even encourages us that if we leave all to follow him we will receive it back (with persecutions) both in this life and in the life to come (Mark 10:30). The Christian life is not devoid of blessing or reward. To be sure it has a more spiritual focus, but it is not without physical manifestation.

However, this differs from the specific blessings bestowed upon Israel. Why is that? In the New Testament, and even indicated in the Old Testament, the land of Israel and its blessings ultimately represent a type and picture of heaven itself. Hebrews 11:10 tells us that the Patriarchs were looking forward to a heavenly city. In 13:14 it underscores that here we have no lasting city, but we seek one that is to come. The land pointed to heaven.

In the book of Revelation, we see a spiritual fulfillment of the promised blessings in Leviticus. There we see the complete absence of our true enemies at the end of all things: sin, the flesh, and the devil. The devil, who reigns over the spiritual military might and the powers of darkness against us, meets his ultimate fate in being cast forever into the Lake of Fire. As for the fruitfulness of that place, we encounter the tree of life that bears its fruit unceasingly, and its leaves bring healing to the nations. Ultimately, the fruitfulness of the land described here points us to heaven. In that heavenly realm, we have access to the tree of life, which offers us the fountain and assurance of eternal life in Christ.

By putting all these aspects together, we come to realize that God's ultimate promise to us for a life of sanctification, not based on our own merit, but as a result of His grace, is the infinite gift of eternal life. Remember the verse we read in Galatians 6: those who so to the Spirit will also reap from the Spirit--not just earthly blessings, but eternal life.

The fact that these rewards and promises are portrayed as pictures of heaven itself is the strongest evidence that they are not to be understood as earned through our sinful, impure works. How could we ever imagine that our finite, imperfect efforts could earn us heaven or the favor of God? It is only by the

wonderful and gracious drawing of the Lord that we are able to serve Him with the assurance of His blessing and obedience.

Now, practically speaking, how does this knowledge help us? Well, once again, Galatians 6 emphasizes the reality that we will reap in due season if we do not give up. The Christian life, especially after we embark on our journey, can be long and arduous. While it is filled with many joys and pleasures, we must not underestimate the weariness and fatigue that can often overtake us. This is true for all believers, whether they have been Christians for a long time or are newly converted, whether they are pastors leading the church or members of the congregation. The Christian life is a call to take up our cross, die to self, and live for God. This task can be immensely tiring.

Yet, what a comfort and encouragement it is to know that God desires to help us and has laid out before us, though He is under no obligation to do so, our reward for a life of service to Him. Although He graciously blesses us, both spiritually and materially, to remind us of His favor and love as His children, the only lasting fruit and true peace from the daily onslaught of our enemies can be found in our unbreakable fellowship and communion with God, which we will fully experience in Christ in the heavenly realms. In times of weariness and stress, let us remember the Lord's gracious promise that He will not forget our works, our lives, or our love for Him. He will one day usher in that glorious day with showers of blessings and joy when we dwell with Him in heaven forever.

#27 - Devotional Meditations on Leviticus 27:1-34

In many ways Leviticus 26 seemed as if it was building up to a final crescendo. If we compare the book to a symphony, we can think of it as having many movements, and a few interludes, but some clear common themes that tie it all together. Leviticus 26 thus stands as the pivotal grande finale, where the blessings and curses of the covenant are revealed in a historical prophecy of Israel's future. In verses 1-13, we witness the sweetness of blessings promised to the faithful. However, we also see the justice and vengeance of God, along with stern warnings against apostasy and unbelief. This serves as a prophetic foreshadowing of what will happen if they disobey. As readers, we know that God remains true to His word, bringing judgments upon His people. But amidst the promises of blessings and warnings of judgments, Leviticus 26 concludes with a grand declaration that God, though deeply offended, will forgive their sins and restore them when they acknowledge, repent, and mourn their transgressions. It is a powerful ending, like the finale of a symphony, revealing God's grace.

However, the book of Leviticus doesn't end here. We still have to look at chapter 27. At first glance, it may appear to be a mere appendix, fitting with the overall teaching and Mosaic authorship. Yet, we should not view it this way. Moses intentionally includes this chapter here to convey something about the fruits of God's provisions and the themes of devotion and consecration seen throughout the book. This passage deals with special vows of devotion and consecration to the Lord. It highlights how our lives should flow out of all that God has provided. By understanding the details of this passage and considering it in the context of the entire book, we can grasp its teachings about how we should view our own lives. It serves as a lens through which we recognize ourselves as devoted and consecrated to the service and glory of our covenant God.

First, let us consider this question of consecration devotion to the Lord as expressed in Israel's offerings. Generally speaking, in OT times two types of offerings were observed. The first comprised regularly appointed offerings, which were presented daily before the priests, yearly on designated festival days, or

monthly during new moon celebrations. They adhered to fixed schedules and dates. In addition to these regular offerings, there were special offerings and unique aspects of worship, which are the focal point of this chapter. We might refer to them as free will offerings. These offerings were made alongside regular gifts or offerings, signifying a specific dedication of something the giver possessed for the service of the Lord.

Now, how did this process work? While the exact mechanics are not entirely clear in all the passages, it seems that the priests would take possession of the dedicated items, which were then used to sustain and support the priests and their families as they devoted themselves to the service of the Lord. It's essential to remember that the priests not only fulfilled their duties within the temple or the Tabernacle but also resided among the people, serving as teachers similar to present-day pastors or ministers of the Word. Various items, whether it be a person's labor, an animal, a house, or a field, would be consecrated so that the priesthood could utilize them to support themselves and their families. Since the priests had no inheritance or land in Israel, their livelihood depended on the provisions dedicated to God.

As we explore the passage, we encounter three primary categories of things or people that could be dedicated or devoted to the Lord. In other words, there are three types of vows, dedications, or promises made concerning different aspects.

First, in verses 1-8, we find the dedication of persons, likely servants or slaves. If you desire a comprehensive understanding of the biblical teaching on slavery, we have covered this topic in several sermons and devotionals, including Leviticus, Ephesians, and various pastoral epistles of Paul. In summary, the Bible never endorses slavery as a permanent institution but regulated it to mitigate its sinful effects.

This passage does not directly address the issue of slavery or provide guidance on how to deal with it. Instead, the focus here is on assessing the value of the work performed by individuals. When a person or servant is dedicated to the Lord and assigned to a specific task, such as serving a priest's family, their value is determined based on their ability to fulfill that task. In the OT, slavery can be understood as a form of ownership or indentured servitude, where ownership is attributed to the person's work rather than the person themselves. This distinction is crucial to recognize. Factors such as gender, age, and life phase all contribute to evaluating the amount of work and the time allotted to a person. Thus, provisions and vows exist regarding individuals dedicated to the Lord and His service.

Additionally, in verse 9, there are vows related to items such as livestock, such as cattle, sheep, and various animals. Livestock served as a form of currency alongside traditional forms of money, such as coins made of gold and silver, which have been discovered through ancient archaeology. However, animals constituted a significant portion of their wealth. Therefore, dedicating an animal to the Lord meant offering a portion of one's wealth. Some of these animals could be devoted specifically for offerings and sacrifices. Others, including unclean animals, might have been employed for different purposes, such as work, farming, or transportation. This illustrates how dedication to a specific purpose functioned, considering factors like the type of animal and its value in terms of work and sustenance.

In verse 14, we encounter another section that deals with the dedication of inanimate objects like houses, fields, and similar items. The valuation of fields is determined by whether they are part of the family inheritance, as this carries special significance, representing the Lord's inheritance in heaven. Alternatively, if a field is not part of the family land, it is valued differently. Another factor taken into account is the proximity to the year of Jubilee, which we previously studied. The closer it is, the lower its

value, while the farther away, the higher its value, as it is primarily assessed based on its potential yield and productivity. The determining factor remains the field's ability to produce a fruitful harvest.

This pattern of assessment is consistent across different categories: people are evaluated based on their capacity for work, animals on their value for sacrifice or labor, and houses or other types of fields according to their productive potential.

Additionally, we find an appendix to this section, concerning firstborn animals, which cannot be given to the Lord as they are already devoted to Him according to a previous provision in the book. Furthermore, the concept of tithing, where Israel was called to give 10% of their entire increase to the Lord, is also mentioned. Finally, in verse 34, there is a summary that encompasses not only the chapter but the entire book. Throughout various aspects of life, including interactions with individuals, particularly servants, ownership of animals, and possession of land and homes, there are provisions to facilitate their special dedication through vows to the Lord.

What is the theological significance of these provisions, especially as they are positioned here at the end of the book?

There are three things to note in this respect:

First, this chapter underscores that every aspect of our lives is to be lived in consecrated devotion to God. Moses and God's instructions encompass various spheres of life, including relationships with servants and fellow human beings, ownership of animals and livestock, wealth, land, homes, and other possessions. But it is essential to remember that when we dedicate something to the Lord or offer it to Him, it represents a token of our entire lives. By placing this chapter, which deals with freely dedicated vows to God, in the end, Moses imparts a lesson about how we should approach our lives in His presence. It is not only our possessions or wealth that should be lived in light of this dedication, but our very selves. This realization is critical because we sometimes succumb to the temptation of viewing church or worship solely as an occasion to receive from God. While it is true that we come to receive, worship also calls for a response—our commitment to devote our lives to Him. We express this commitment through vows, promises, and acts of faith, such as taking membership vows or confessing with our hearts and mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing in His resurrection. We pledge to serve Him with our entire being, for all our days. Thus, we emerge from the worship of God and the work of Christ, not only expressing gratitude for His saving grace but also declaring our union with Jesus and our resolve to devote our lives to God.

And this leads us to a second interconnected point concerning the covenantal relationship between these aspects in the New Testament. Sometimes, we refer to ethics or the Christian way of life in terms of the indicative and imperative. The indicative represents what God has accomplished for us—our salvation and forgiveness. The imperative, then, denotes the obligations that naturally flow from these realities. Consider the immediate obligation arising from God's forgiveness of our sins. It is succinctly captured in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Thus, it is vital to recognize that Leviticus 27, which focuses on our verbal expressions of devotion to God, fundamentally involves a commitment and promise. Significantly, this chapter follows Leviticus 26, wherein God declares His covenantal vows and promises—either to bless His people for their faith and obedience or to discipline them for unbelief. Here, we encounter a covenantal dynamic. Let us recall the summary of this covenantal idea found in Leviticus 26: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people. I will walk among them and be their God" (verses 11-12). Even as God has spoken His covenantal word,

promising what He will do in His redemptive and reconciled relationship with His people, Leviticus 27 serves as a reminder that we also have a part to play—we make promises and devote ourselves to God.

Now, let us pause and reflect on the significance of this. Whenever we encounter moments of struggle in our Christian lives, there may be occasions when we hesitate to fulfill God's call. We may know what is right, yet find ourselves resistant. In such instances, it is crucial to remind ourselves of the promises and vows we have made. Whether in the context of the church, marriage, or our direct relationship with God, we need to recall that we have made a solemn commitment. We may come up with numerous excuses to justify our delay or neglect in fulfilling our obligations, but ultimately, if we fail to act, we contradict our own words. The call to make a vow of devotion to the Lord is not only a divine directive but also a source of assistance to us. It reminds us that this is what we ourselves pledged to do, providing us with additional motivation and accountability.

And that brings us to a third important point. This point revolves around the stark contrast between the unwavering truthfulness and commitment to God's word versus our inconsistent and unreliable nature. In Leviticus Chapter 26, we witness the resolute and direct nature of God's covenant word, where He unequivocally states the consequences of certain actions. He assures us that His side of the covenant, whether for blessing or curse, is absolute and guaranteed. But can the same be said about us? Are we as steadfast with our words and promises? Regrettably, the answer is no.

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, advises us not to make vows at all but to let our yes be yes and our no be no. This does not mean that Jesus rejects the idea of making vows entirely. In fact, He accepts the vow imposed upon Him during His trial and crucifixion. Similarly, the Apostle Paul also takes oaths and vows before the Lord in his letters. Jesus' point is to emphasize the fickleness and inconsistency inherent in human nature when it comes to our words and promises.

This underlying premise is crucial throughout Leviticus 27. The chapter delves into meticulous details regarding various situations, such as age and capability, to determine the value assigned to individuals, land, animals, and tithings. These details reflect the reality of human behavior, as we often seek to maximize our gains while exerting minimal effort. It is our sinful inclination to pursue the highest reward for the least input. To counteract this tendency, God calls us to make vows and commit ourselves to Him. This commitment serves as a reminder of our sins and shortcomings, encouraging us to strive for greater devotion and awareness.

Leviticus 27 also highlights the provision for atonement, not only for general sins committed throughout the year but also for ongoing and specific transgressions. This provision acknowledges that, despite our dedication to a living sacrifice for God, we are still prone to sin and imperfection. How grateful we should be that throughout the book of Leviticus, we find the means to continuously seek forgiveness for all our sins, both general and specific.

By placing Leviticus 27 in its context, we understand that everything we have seen in the preceding chapters points to Christ and His work. He serves as the vicarious sacrifice, offering Himself in our place, and the mediator between God and humanity. Through His blood atonement, He propitiates for the sins of the people. All of this builds up to the call for us to live lives consecrated and devoted to God through our vows, spoken with our mouths and demonstrated in our actions.

Leviticus 27 teaches us that our lives in Christ are to be lived in consecration and devotion to the Lord. For those who give themselves in sacrificial service for Him and others, He promises abundant blessings,

including the hope of eternal life. In this, we are conformed to the example of Christ, who devoted Himself to our service as both our priest and sacrifice. We in turn can live our lives today to bring glory and honor to Him. May cause us to experience the rich blessing and joy that comes from a life of selfless dedication to our Savior, and may he add to us the grace and strength to persevere in this calling to be consecrated to the Lord Jesus Christ.