

# OBEY & BE HOLY

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## Chronological Reading : Leviticus 17-25

This entire month of February has been challenging reading. My Bible reading plan has carried me through Exodus and Leviticus over the last four weeks. No, this isn't the first time I've read these books/accounts, but I am really wrestling with application. I don't think that every "jot and tittle" of the Levitical code is applicable for us today, but I am really having a difficult time with how to determine what is applied today and what is not. Probably the most disconcerting aspect of this "wrestling match" is the nagging question of whom or what arbitrates the decrees and regulations set forth by God.

I enjoy the study of Biblical interpretation and have been challenged time and again in the way I process Scripture. Most recently, I have been challenged to rethink my processes and test my hermeneutics again. Late summer I read Scot McKnight's *Blue Parakeet* (Click here for that review). In that book, Scot challenged our interpretation skills with the premise that "we pick and choose" what we obey and/or agree is applicable for today. I don't want to go into detail about all the implications and discussion that might ensue from that premise, but recommend the book very highly. At any rate, my thinking and my interpretation of Scripture has been challenged...and that's where I'm at for now. What does all this mean? Well, like I said, I've been reading for the past month through Exodus and Leviticus... Exodus poses some problems for me, but not to the degree that I am unable to deal with them. Leviticus, on the other hand, is a whole other ballgame.

Let me start with this premise; I don't think we are subject to every decree and regulation today. On the other hand, I think because some of the commands have been superseded, we have a tendency to toss much out that we might still be accountable to. I know my statement might seem convoluted, but I'm trying to be unbiased and open in my "wrestling" so I might better understand. So, here's some of what I've been processing...Scriptures follow:

Lev. 18:5 "If you obey my decrees and my regulations, you will find life through them"

Lev. 18:26 "You must obey all my decrees and regulations."

Lev. 18:30 "So obey my instructions..."

Lev. 19:19 "You must obey all my decrees."

Lev. 19:37 "You must be careful to keep all of my decrees and regulations by putting them into practice. I am the LORD."

Lev. 20:8 "Keep all my decrees by putting them into practice, for I am the LORD who makes you holy."

Lev. 20:21 "You must keep all my decrees and regulations by putting them into practice."

Lev. 22:9 "They will be punished for their sins and will die for violating my instructions."

Lev. 22:31 "You must faithfully keep all my commands by putting them into practice for I am the LORD."

Something about the repetition tells me that I should pay attention. I think the LORD wants us to obey Him. The question about this particular emphasis on obedience is the big "what." The context and instruction involves everything

from dietary laws, to sexual practices, to personal conduct, and more...what is for today and what was for then? Before sharing some of my other thoughts, let me go on to point out these following Scriptures as well:

Lev. 11:45 "Therefore, you must be holy because I am holy."

Lev. 19:2 "You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."

Lev. 20:7 "So set yourselves apart to be holy, for I am the LORD your God."

Lev. 20:8 "For I am the LORD who makes you holy."

Lev. 20:26 "You must be holy because, I, the LORD, am holy. I have set you apart from all other people to be my very own."

Lev. 21:6 "They (priests) must be set apart as holy to their God, and must never bring shame on the name of God. They must be holy..."

Lev. 21:8 "You must consider them (priests) holy because I, the LORD, am holy, and I make you holy."

Lev. 21:15 "I am the LORD who makes him (priest) holy."

Lev. 21:23 "I am the LORD who makes them (priests) holy."

Lev. 22:9 "I am the LORD who makes them (priests) holy."

Lev. 22:16 "I am the LORD who makes them (priests) holy."

Lev. 22:32 "Do not bring shame on my holy name, for I will display my holiness among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who makes you holy."

Once more, there is an incredible amount of repetition. I'm thinking the LORD wants us to get a point... Something else popped into my mind while I was reading all this repetition, especially when I was reading about the relationship of holiness to the priesthood.

*"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." (1 Peter 2:9)*

Or consider this; *"He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father. All glory and power to him forever and ever!"* (The full context can be found in Revelation 1:4-6). Not that I intend to get off on a tangent, but I think we are considered in the category of priests...although the role and duties we share today may be different, we are still set apart for the glory and service of our LORD. As much as this may be the case, we are called to be holy; I think with the same degree of accountability that was directed to the Aaronic priesthood.

So, what am I getting from all of this...why the wrestling? I think we try to split hairs too much. I think that, too often, we are trying to see what we can "get away with" more than what we are to obey. While we have been set free from the Law, we still like the Law. We like the fact that we can justify loopholes, qualify, and quantify our actions...barter with our behavior to find favor in the eyes of man and hopefully thinking we can do the same with God. I don't think it works that way. I think the deal is this; regardless of whether the edicts, decrees, and regulations are pertinent for a nomadic, middle-eastern, oriental people from four thousand plus years ago or a Greco-roman influenced westerner of the twenty-first century...God wants us to obey Him. The LORD wants us to be set apart and different from the creation that

continues to suffer from the fallout of Adam's disobedience. God wants us to be purged of our pride and allow ourselves to be guided by His tenets and precepts.

Augustine wrote in his sermon on *Nature and Grace*, "Pride is the beginning of all sin...The beginning of the pride of man, is to fall away from God." This is why we continue to fail. This is why we continue to struggle. When we try to scour God's Word for loopholes and cultural-generational relevance, it betrays the condition of our hearts...and pride. We want to do things our way; we want to guide ourselves. God repeatedly and emphatically tells us that we are different and that He has set us apart (and created us) for Himself. He has design and purpose for us that is much bigger than we are in ourselves. The sum of our parts (His Church) is much greater than our individuality, but we don't get that...because we are hung up and choking on our own pride. No, our pride does not want to acknowledge the greater purpose of God...especially if it means that God's purposes might come at my own expense. Our pride lies at the root of our "choice to fail" and regardless of our best efforts; our pride serves to spite ourselves.

The answer comes to us in the form of simple trust. If we would only listen and seek the guiding counsel of the ONE who truly loves us, we would experience deliverance and peace. Hear the words of the psalmist that follow:

*The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control." (Psalm 32: 8-9)*

So, I struggle and I wrestle with interpreting Scripture. I am called to be faithful and honest in my interpretation. I will be held accountable and judged more critically because of my call to teach and preach. So...I wrestle; what is for today and what was for yesterday? Today I have come to this conclusion; Obedience and Holiness. God wants me to trust His guidance and obey His leading; period. Listening to Him and having an intimately close relationship with Him is the key to knowing what He wants me to obey. I think Thomas Merton said it very well; *"My life is listening, His is speaking. My salvation is to hear and respond."*

I close this meditation with a Collect for Guidance from Robert Benson's latest book, *The Echo Within*.

*"Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Grant that we may perceive the ways in which you are calling to us, and grant us strength and courage to pursue those things and to accomplish them." Amen.*