

INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS CHAPTER 18

Here is,

I. A general law against all conformity to the corrupt usages of the heathen, **#Le 18:1-5.**

II. Particular laws,

1. Against incest, **#Le 18:6-18.**

2. Against beastly lusts, and barbarous idolatries, **#Le 18:19-23.**

III. The enforcement of these laws from the ruin of the Canaanites, **#Le 18:24-30.**

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 5.

After divers ceremonial institutions, God here returns to the enforcement of moral precepts. The former are still of use to us as types, the latter still binding as laws. We have here,

1. The sacred authority by which these laws are enacted: *I am the Lord your God* (**#Le 18:1,4,30**), and *I am the Lord*, **#Le 18:5-6,21.**

"The Lord, who has a right to rule all; your God, who has a peculiar right to rule you."

Jehovah is the fountain of being, and therefore the fountain of power, whose we are, whom we are bound to serve, and who is able to punish all disobedience.

"Your God to whom you have consented, in whom you are happy, to whom you lie under the highest obligations imaginable, and to whom you are accountable."

2. A strict caution to take heed of retaining the relics of the idolatries of Egypt, where they had dwelt, and of receiving the infection of the idolatries of Canaan, whither they were now going, **#Le 18:3.** Now that God was by Moses teaching them his ordinances there was *aliquid dediscendum --something to be unlearned*, which they had sucked in with their milk in Egypt, a country noted for idolatry: *You shall not do after the doings of the land of Egypt.* It would be the greatest absurdity in itself to retain such an affection for their house of bondage as to be governed in their devotions by the usages of it, and the greatest ingratitude to God, who had so wonderfully and graciously delivered them. Nay, as if governed by a spirit of contradiction, they would be in danger, even after they had received these ordinances of God, of admitting the wicked usages of the Canaanites and of inheriting their vices with their land. Of this danger they are here warned, *You shall not walk in their ordinances.* Such a tyrant is custom that their practices are called *ordinances*, and they became rivals even with God's ordinances, and God's professing people were in danger of receiving law from them.

3. A solemn charge to them to *keep God's judgments, statutes, and ordinances*, **#Le 18:4-5.** To this charge, and many similar ones, David seems to refer in the many prayers and professions he makes relating to God's laws in the 119th Psalm. Observe here,

(1.) The great rule of our obedience--God's statutes and judgments. These we must *keep*

to walk therein. We must keep them in our books, and keep them in our hands, that we may practise them in our hearts and lives. Remember God's commandments to do them, #Ps 103:18. We must keep in them as our way to travel in, keep to them as our rule to work by, keep them as our treasure, as the apple of our eye, with the utmost care and value.

(2.) The great advantage of our obedience: *Which if a man do, he shall live in them*, that is,

"he shall be happy here and hereafter."

We have reason to thank God,

[1.] That this is still in force as a promise, with a very favourable construction of the condition. If we keep God's commandments in sincerity, though we come short of sinless perfection, we shall find that the way of duty is the way of comfort, and will be the way to happiness. Godliness has the *promise of life*, #1Ti 4:8. Wisdom has said, *Keep my commandments and live: and if through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body* (which are to us as the usages of Egypt were to Israel) *we shall live*.

[2.] That it is not so in force in the nature of a covenant as that the least transgression shall for ever exclude us from this life. The apostle quotes this twice as opposite to the faith which the gospel reveals. It is the description of the *righteousness which is by the law, the man that doeth them shall live ev autois--in them* (#Ro 10:5), and is urged to prove that *the law is not of faith*, #Ga 3:12. The alteration which the gospel has made is in the last word: still *the man that does them shall live*, but not *live in them*; for the law could not give life, because we could not perfectly keep it; it was *weak through the flesh*, not in itself; but now *the man that does them shall live by the faith of the Son of God*. He shall owe his life to the grace of Christ, and not to the merit of his own works; #Ga 3:21-22. *The just shall live*, but they shall live *by faith*, by virtue of their union with Christ, who is their life.

Ver. 6. thru Ver. 18.

These laws relate to the seventh commandment, and, no doubt, are obligatory on us under the gospel, for they are consonant to the very light and law of nature: one of the articles, that of a man's having his father's wife, the apostle speaks of as a sin *not so much as named among the Gentiles*, #1Co 5:1. Though some of the incests here forbidden were practised by some particular persons among the heathen, yet they were disallowed and detested, unless among those nations who had become barbarous, and were quite given up to vile affections. Observe,

I. That which is forbidden as to the relations here specified is *approaching to them to uncover their nakedness*, #Le 18:6.

1. It is chiefly intended to forbid the marrying of any of these relations. Marriage is a divine institution; this and the sabbath, the eldest of all, of equal standing with man upon the earth: it is intended for the comfort of human life, and the decent and honourable propagation of the human race, such as became the dignity of man's nature above that of the beasts. It is *honourable in all*, and these laws are for the support of the honour of it. It was requisite that a divine ordinance should be subject to divine rules and restraints, especially because it concerns a thing wherein the corrupt nature of man is as apt as in any thing to be wilful and impetuous in its desires, and impatient of check. Yet these prohibitions, besides their being enacted by an incontestable authority, are in themselves highly reasonable and equitable.

(1.) By marriage two were to become one flesh, therefore those that before were in a sense one flesh by nature could not, without the greatest absurdity, become one flesh by institution; for the institution was designed to unite those who before were not united.

(2.) Marriage puts an equality between husband and wife.

"Is she not thy companion taken out of thy side?"

Therefore, if those who before were superior and inferior should intermarry (which is the case in most of the instances here laid down), the order of nature would be taken away by a positive institution, which must by no means be allowed. The inequality between master and servant, noble and ignoble, is founded in consent and custom, and there is no harm done if that be taken away by the equality of marriage; but the inequality between parents and children, uncles and nieces, aunts and nephews, either by blood or marriage, is founded in nature, and is therefore perpetual, and cannot without confusion be taken away by the equality of marriage, the institution of which, though ancient, is subsequent to the order of nature.

(3.) No relations that are equals are forbidden, except brothers and sisters, by the whole blood or half blood, or by marriage; and in this there is not the same natural absurdity as in the former, for Adam's sons must of necessity have married their own sisters; but it was requisite that it should be made by a positive law unlawful and detestable, for the preventing of sinful familiarities between those that in the days of their youth are supposed to live in a house together, and yet cannot intermarry without defeating one of the intentions of marriage, which is the enlargement of friendship and interest. If every man married his own sister (as they would be apt to do from generation to generation if it were lawful), each family would be a world to itself, and it would be forgotten that *we are members one of another*. It is certain that this has always been looked upon by the more sober heathen as a most infamous and abominable thing; and those who had not this law yet were herein a law to themselves. The making use of the ordinance of marriage for the patronizing of incestuous mixtures is so far from justifying them, or extenuating their guilt, that it adds the guilt of profaning an ordinance of God, and prostituting that to the vilest of purposes which was instituted for the noblest ends. But,

2. Uncleaness, committed with any of these relations out of marriage, is likewise, without doubt, forbidden here, and no less intended than the former: as also all lascivious carriage, wanton dalliance, and every thing that has the appearance of this evil. Relations must love one another, and are to have free and familiar converse with each other, but it must be with all purity; and the less it is suspected of evil by others the more care ought the persons themselves to take that *Satan do not get advantage against them*, for he is a very subtle enemy, and seeks all occasions against us.

II. The relations forbidden are most of them plainly described; and it is generally laid down as a rule that what relations of a man's own he is bound up from marrying the same relations of his wife he is likewise forbidden to marry, for they two are one. That law which forbids marrying a brother's wife (#Le 18:16) had an exception peculiar to the Jewish state, that, if a man died without issue, his brother or next of kin should marry the widow, and raise up seed to the deceased (#De 25:5), for reasons which held good only in that commonwealth; and therefore now that those reasons have ceased the exception ceases, and the law is in force, that a man must in no case marry his brother's widow. That article (#Le 18:18) which forbids a man to *take a wife to her sister* supposes a connivance at polygamy, as some other laws then did (#Ex 21:10; De 21:15), but forbids a man's marrying two sisters, as Jacob did, because between those who had before been equal there would

be apt to arise greater jealousies and animosities than between wives that were not so nearly related. If the sister of the wife be taken for the concubine, or secondary wife, nothing can be more vexing in her life, or as long as she lives.

Ver. 19. thru Ver. 30.

Here is,

I. A law to preserve the honour of the marriage-bed, that it should not be unseasonably used (#Le 18:19), nor invaded by an adulterer, #Le 18:20.

II. A law against that which was the most unnatural idolatry, causing their children to *pass through the fire to Moloch*, #Le 18:21. Moloch (as some think) was the idol in and by which they worshipped the sun, that great fire of the world; and therefore in the worship of it they made their own children either sacrifices to this idol, burning them to death before it, or devotees to it, causing them to pass between two fires, as some think, or to be thrown through one, to the honour of this pretended deity, imagining that the consecrating of but one of their children in this manner to Moloch would procure good fortune for all the rest of their children. Did idolaters thus give their own children to false gods, and shall we think any thing too dear to be dedicated to, or to be parted with for, the true God? See how this sin of Israel (which they were afterwards guilty of, notwithstanding this law) is aggravated by the relation which they and their children stood in to God. #Eze 16:20, *Thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these thou hast sacrificed*. Therefore it is here called *profaning the name of their God*; for it looked as if they thought they were under greater obligations to Moloch than to Jehovah; for to him they offered their cattle only, but to Moloch their children.

III. A law against unnatural lusts, sodomy and bestiality, sins not to be named nor thought of without the utmost abhorrence imaginable, #Le 18:22-23. Other sins level men with the beasts, but these sink them much lower. That ever there should have been occasion for the making of these laws, and that since they are published they should ever have been broken, is the perpetual reproach and scandal of human nature; and the giving of men up to these vile affections was frequently the punishment of their idolatries; so the apostle shows, #Ro 1:24.

IV. Arguments against these and the like abominable wickedness. He that has an indisputable right to command us, yet because he will deal with us as men, and *draw with the cords of a man*, condescends to reason with us.

1. Sinners defile themselves with these abominations: *Defile not yourselves in any of these things*, #Le 18:24. All sin is defiling to the conscience, but these are sins that have a peculiar turpitude in them. Our heavenly Father, in kindness to us, requires of us that we keep ourselves clean, and do not wallow in the dirt.
2. *The souls that commit them shall be cut off*, #Le 18:29. And justly; for, *if any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy*, #1Co 3:17. Fleshly lusts war against the soul, and will certainly be the ruin of it if God's mercy and grace prevent not.
3. *The land is defiled*, #Le 18:25. If such wickedness as these be practised and connived at, the land is thereby made unfit to have God's tabernacle in it, and the pure and holy God will withdraw the tokens of his gracious presence from it. It is also rendered unwholesome to the inhabitants, who are hereby infected with sin and exposed to plagues and it is really nauseous and loathsome to all good men in it, as the wickedness of Sodom was to the soul of righteous Lot.

4. These have been the abominations of the former inhabitants, **#Le 18:24,27**. Therefore it was necessary that these laws should be made, as antidotes and preservatives from the plague are necessary when we go into an infected place. And therefore they should not practise any such things, because the nations that had practised them now lay under the curse of God, and were shortly to fall by the sword of Israel. They could not but be sensible how odious those people had made themselves who wallowed in this mire, and how they stank in the nostrils of all good men; and shall a people sanctified and dignified as Israel was make themselves thus vile? When we observe how ill sin looks in others we should use this as an argument with ourselves with the utmost care and caution to preserve our purity.

5. For these and the like sins the Canaanites were to be destroyed; these filled the measure of the Amorites' iniquity (**#Ge 15:16**), and brought down that destruction of so many populous kingdoms which the Israelites were now shortly to be not only the spectators, but the instruments of: *Therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it*, **#Le 18:25**. Note, The tremendous judgments of God, executed on those that are daringly profane and atheistical, are intended as warnings to those who profess religion to take heed of every thing that has the least appearance of, or tendency towards, profaneness or atheism. Even the ruin of the Canaanites is an admonition to the Israelites not to do like them. Nay, to show that not only the Creator is provoked, but the creation burdened, by such abominations as these, it is added (**#Le 18:25**), *The land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants*. The very ground they went upon did, as it were, groan under them, and was sick of them, and not easy till it had discharged itself of these *enemies of the Lord*, **#Isa 1:24**. This bespeaks the extreme loathsomeness of sin; sinful man indeed *drinks in iniquity like water*, but the harmless part of the creation even heaves at it, and rises against it. Many a house and many a town have spued out the wicked inhabitants, as it were, with abhorrence, **#Re 3:16**. Therefore take heed, saith God, *that the land spue not you out also*, **#Le 18:28**. It was secured to them, and entailed upon them, and yet they must expect that, if they made the vices of the Canaanites their own, with their land their fate would be the same. Note, Wicked Israelites are as abominable to God as wicked Canaanites, and more so, and will be as soon spued out, or sooner. Such a warning as was here given to the Israelites is given by the apostle to the Gentile converts, with reference to the rejected Jews, in whose room they were substituted (**#Ro 11:19**); they must take heed of falling *after the same example of unbelief*, **#Heb 4:11**. Apply it more generally; and let it deter us effectually from all sinful courses to consider how many they have been the ruin of. Lay the ear of faith to the gates of the bottomless pit, and hear the doleful shrieks and outcries of damned sinners, whom earth has spued out and hell has swallowed, that find themselves undone, for ever undone, by sin; and tremble lest this be your portion at last. God's threatenings and judgments should frighten us from sin.

V. The chapter concludes with a sovereign antidote against this infection: *Therefore you shall keep my ordinance that you commit not any one of these abominable customs*, **#Le 18:30**. This is the remedy prescribed. Note,

1. Sinful customs are abominable customs, and their being common and fashionable does not make them at all the less abominable nor should we the less abominate them, but the more; because the more customary they are the more dangerous they are.

2. It is of pernicious consequence to admit and allow of any one sinful custom, because one will make way for many, *Uno absurdo dato, mille sequuntur --Admit but a single*

absurdity, you invite a thousand. The way of sin is downhill.

3. A close and constant adherence to God's ordinances is the most effectual preservative from the infection of gross sin. The more we taste of the sweetness and feel of the power of holy ordinances the less inclination we shall have to the forbidden pleasures of sinners' abominable customs. It is the grace of God only that will secure us, and that grace is to be expected only in the use of the means of grace. Nor does God ever leave any to their own hearts' lusts till they have first left him and his institutions.