

Leviticus 18 Center Your Sexual Ethic

Marriage is not only undervalued in our society, marriage is currently being undermined. The current confusion that we have over marriage truly should not come as a surprise to Christians, mainly because most of us don't value marriage. Marriage, as we have been looking at for these weeks now at Oxford, is a God ordained and established institution between a man and a woman to express the reality of the union of God as well as express the reality that we will one day experience with God through Christ. Ephesians 5:32 says it plainly, *this mystery is profound, and I tell you it refers to Christ and the church.*

The key, then, to understanding marriage is to know Jesus. Every marriage, whether or not they know it or not expresses what will one day be the reality for eternity - Christ and His Church. Honestly, there may be some marriages that are clearer picture than others of this relationship, but each relationship in some way mysteriously points to this.

For weeks we have been looking at marriage at Oxford and grounding our understanding of marriage in the foundation of what it points towards - the Gospel - the good news of God coming to save. It should be clear by this point that homosexuality, adultery, pornography, incest, bestiality, and many other sexual distortions are not what God intended; but our cultural climate is such today that Christians need to ensure that we are clear on the sexual ethic of Christianity, lest we are guilty of walking away from our Lord.

The issue, as we are going to explore today with our look at sexual ethics, and specifically homosexuality, is how we understand Jesus and His Word. We have to understand this issue as a larger issue of Who is Jesus and What is the Bible?

In order to do this, we turn to Leviticus 18. Perhaps such a move is shocking, why, you may be asking, are we going to Leviticus, why not turn to the New Testament, should we even read Leviticus anymore?

Remember what Jesus said while He was on the earth teaching. He said of the Law, I came not to abolish it but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Indeed, the whole Old Testament is looking ahead to the day when the Word will become flesh and dwell amongst us as well as looking beyond when the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. So, Leviticus, just like Psalms, Proverbs, and Isaiah must be read in light of Christ. There are some things in Leviticus that are not binding for us today because of where we are in relation to Christ. Christ has come, is right now seated at the right hand of the Father, is with us here today, as well as is coming!

READ TEXT

So, how do we read Leviticus through the lens of Christ and how do we know which texts are still binding to us and which texts are still in effect?

- Let me reiterate again that every follower of Jesus must take the Old Testament seriously. We are not dismissive of the Old Testament, all Scripture is breathed by God

- and profitable for teaching, correcting, and training in righteousness, to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). But there is a difference between the Testaments (Covenants) and the only reason that we know the difference is Jesus.
- But what are the specific difference?
 - All foods have been declared clean (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:8 - 11:18)
 - Holy days are optional (Romans 14:5-6)
 - There is no more need for the sacrificial system because Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed (Hebrews 7:1 - 10:18)
 - The Old Testament, especially Leviticus, reveals to us another aspect to the righteousness of God and what it means to be holy.
 - Leviticus 19:18, *Love your neighbor as yourself* was referred to by Jesus more than any other OT verse!
 - Peter and Paul both quote Leviticus showing us that the ethic and morality of Leviticus (unlike the ceremonial aspects) are still binding for us today.
 - The Law, as Paul says is meant to lead us to Christ and this is exactly the whole need to have the discussion with the world today. God has a word for the world today and it is the same as it has always been. *I AM THE LORD!*

So, as we are looking at Leviticus we need to ask this question: "Why does being a Christian mean a different sexual ethic?" As believers we ask to know God and to make Him known. Eternity rests in the balance and so we want to get it right!

Why then does being a Christian mean a different sexual ethic?

1. God is Reforming the World According to Christ

- Notice as we start the chapter the phrase repeated: *I am the LORD your God*
- This lets us know right away the purpose of God in giving these instructions. He is setting a people apart for His own possession, a people through whom salvation would come, a people whose existence was to serve as a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6)
- This phrase is one of the most important phrases in Scripture. Can't you hear the closeness in the term? *I am the LORD your God*. This is the God, who in the recent memory of those to whom it speaks, just redeemed them from the chains of Egyptian slavery. In our memory, not only has he redeemed His people from Egypt but has redeemed and liberated us from the entanglements of sin through the sending of the Son to be our ransom.
- God has always been faithful, even to those who despise Him, He is just and patient. To not accept what He says in this passage is to reject Him as King and Lord
- We, his redeemed, though we face pressure from the outside world, we must be distinctly His. We trust in His Word and prove our loyalty to Him alone.
- Specifically, God is speaking concerning sexual ethics. Why? As Allen Ross tells us, "Sexual intimacy is part of the institution ordained by God at creation; and acts that cross the sexual barriers not only desecrate what is holy but also bring chaos and confusion into human relationships." (Ross, *Holiness to the LORD: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus*, 340.)

- In the beginning the world was the way that God intended it to be, unspoiled by corruption or sin. In this beautiful beginning God planted a Garden and put the man and woman and joined them together in Holy Matrimony and told them to be fruitful and multiply.
- The ground for monogamous heterosexual relationship is in the beginning
- This is why homosexual behavior is looked on in a different light even than adultery. Sin is sin and homosexual behavior is sin because it usurps God's creative order.
- When someone willfully chooses to embrace a homosexual lifestyle they are expressing that they know better than God. I have no doubt that some individuals who have embraced such a lifestyle are good people. Homophobia is wrong, we aren't homophobic, we just have seen the Cross of Christ. We should be friends with homosexuals, friends enough to say you are loved and you are wrong - embracing both truths.
- Christians need to be genuinely careful here. I do not understand why some denominations can suggest that there is nothing wrong with homosexual behavior. The issue is who is Jesus, and what has he said in his word. As you and I know, and even if we don't know it is still true, the word of the Lord stands forever!
- If a church, that local expression of the body of Christ openly embraces homosexual lifestyle as acceptable the heart of the gospel is at stake, and the gospel cannot be compromised no matter how strong the world's systems are against it. When the gospel is compromised we lose, the world loses.

This struggle may be new to us but it is not a new issue. Corinth was a city steeped in a pagan sexual ethic. From that setting, God sent the gospel to them and called a few people to himself to express His glory, they became known as the Corinthian Church. They were troubled but triumphant! They were struggling but building on the solid rock of salvation.

Which leads us to our next point to consider as to why a Christian must be marked by a distinctly different sexual ethic:

2. We Have Been Joined With Christ

- This was the whole basis of Paul's appeal to the church at Corinth. Listen:
- *"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:13-20)*
- Our entire identity is Christ. We are *in Christ*. We belong to Him and right now we are being formed into His image (Romans 8:28-30).
- At this point there needs to be a firm distinction between someone who struggles with sexual sin and someone who has given themselves over to sexual sin. Our daily desire and

command, as believers, is to *take every thought captive and place it under the obedience of Christ.*

- This means that even in the struggle we are witnessing to whom we belong to. This means that we are not delighting in sin, we grieve over sin and are constantly giving ourselves in wholly devotion to our God.
- What it means to be joined with Christ is that Christ is our life
- Look at the blessings that come from obedience (24-30)
- The blessings have found their fullness in Christ and we are in Him
- You and I have the unique opportunity to display before the world that what guides us is not our sexual appetites, what guides us is a deep hunger and thirst for righteousness knowing that we have our fill in Christ!
- God has called us from darkness into light and we are being formed by His delights. His salvation has touched every part of our lives, especially the most intimate parts of our life, including our sexual ethic.
- The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-9
- *Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

Our sexual ethic must be shaped by our salvation. Do you see how impossible homosexuality, how impossible being driven by sexual appetite, is for a child of God?

Here is where the gospel comes in. Here is why as a follower of Christ we confess that too much is at stake. The gospel tells the story of all of us - we are far worse than we could even imagine and far more loved than we could ever hope for. Jesus came to give us life, but we must run from the things that are not him and embrace Him with a heart full of faith!

You may be here today and genuinely struggle with sexual sin, some may even struggle with same-sex attraction. There may be some here today that have had a past laden with sexual sin, or you may have a friend who considers themselves a homosexual. There is peace and forgiveness in Christ. As Corrie ten Boom said, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still." Come to Jesus, come just as you are, and never be the same!