

NOTES
ON
THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

by

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"Things new and old."

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by

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Leviticus 17 - Leviticus 20

In this chapter the reader will find two special points, namely:

- first, that life belongs to the Lord; and,
- secondly, that the power of atonement is in the blood.

The Lord attached peculiar importance to both these things. He would have them impressed upon every member of the congregation.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them, This is the thing which the Lord hath commanded, saying, What man soever there be of the house of Israel, that killeth an ox, or lamb, or goat, in the camp, or that killeth it out of the camp, and bringeth it not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer an offering unto the Lord, before the tabernacle of the Lord; blood shall be imputed unto that man; he hath shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people."

This was a most solemn matter; and we may ask what was involved in offering a sacrifice otherwise than in the manner here prescribed? It was nothing less than robbing the Lord of His rights, and presenting to Satan that which was due to GOD. A man might say, "Can I not offer a sacrifice in one place as well as another?" The answer is, "Life belongs to GOD, and His claim thereto must be recognized in the place which He has appointed - before the tabernacle of the

Lord." That was the only meeting place between GOD and man. To offer elsewhere proved that the heart did not want GOD.

The moral of this is plain. There is one place where GOD has appointed to meet the sinner, and that is the Cross - the antitype of the brazen altar. There and there alone has GOD's claim upon the life been duly recognized. To reject this meeting-place is to bring down judgment upon oneself - it is to trample under foot the just claims of GOD, and to arrogate to oneself a right to life which all have forfeited. It is important to see this.

"And the priest shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar of the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and burn the fat for a sweet savour unto the Lord."

The blood and the fat belonged to GOD. The blessed JESUS fully recognized this. He surrendered His life to GOD, and all his hidden enemies were devoted to Him likewise. He voluntarily walked to the altar and there gave up His precious life; and the fragrant odour of His intrinsic excellency ascended to the throne of GOD. Blessed JESUS! it is sweet, at every step of our way, to be reminded of Thee.

The second point above referred to is clearly stated in verse 11.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls: for IT IS THE BLOOD THAT MAKETH AN ATONEMENT FOR THE SOUL."

The connection between the two points is deeply interesting. When man duly takes his place as one possessing no title whatsoever to life - when he fully recognizes GOD's claims upon him, then the divine record is, "I have given you the life to make an atonement for your soul."

Yes; atonement is GOD's gift to man; and, be it carefully noted, that this atonement is in the blood, and only in the blood.

"It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." It is not the blood and something else. The word is most explicit. It attributes atonement exclusively to the blood. **"Without shedding of blood there is no remission"** (Hebrews 9:22).

It was the death of CHRIST that rent the veil.

- it is **"by the blood of Jesus"** we have **"boldness to enter into the holiest."**
- **"We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins"** (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14).
- **"Having made peace by the blood of his cross."**
- **"Ye who were afar off are made nigh by the blood of his cross."**
- **"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"** (I John 1:7).
- **"They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"** (Revelation 7).
- **"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb"** (Revelation 12).

I would desire to call my reader's earnest attention to the precious and vital doctrine of the

Blood.

I am anxious that he should see its true place. The Blood of CHRIST is the foundation of everything. It is the ground of GOD's righteousness in justifying an ungodly sinner that believes on the name of the Son of GOD; and it is the ground of the sinner's confidence in drawing nigh to a holy GOD who is of purer eyes than to behold evil. GOD would be just in the condemnation of the sinner; but, through the death of CHRIST, He can be just And the justifier of him that believeth - a just GOD and a Saviour. The righteousness of GOD is His consistency with Himself - His acting in harmony with His revealed character. Hence, were it not for the Cross, His consistency with Himself would, of necessity, demand the death and judgment of the sinner; but in the Cross that death and judgment were borne by the sinner's Surety, so that the same divine consistency is perfectly maintained while a holy GOD justifies an ungodly sinner through faith. It is all through the Blood of JESUS - nothing less - nothing more - nothing different.

"It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul."

This is conclusive. This is GOD's simple plan of justification. Man's plan is much more cumbrous, much more roundabout. And not only is it cumbrous and roundabout, but it attributes righteousness to something quite different from what I find in the word. If I look from Genesis 3 down to the close of Revelation, I find the Blood of CHRIST put forward as the alone ground of righteousness. We get pardon, peace, life, righteousness, all by the Blood, and nothing but the Blood. The entire book of Leviticus, and particularly the chapter upon which we have just been meditating, is a commentary upon the doctrine of the Blood. It seems strange to have to insist upon a fact so obvious to every dispassionate teachable student of Holy Scripture. Yet so it is. Our minds are prone to slip away from the plain testimony of the Word. We are ready to adopt opinions without ever calmly investigating them in the light of the divine testimonies. In this way we get into confusion, darkness, and error.

May we all learn to give the Blood of CHRIST its due Place! It is so precious in GOD's sight that He will not suffer ought else to be added to or mingled with it.

"The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul."

Leviticus 18

This section sets before us, in a very remarkable manner, the personal sanctity and moral propriety which the Lord looked for, on the part of those whom He had graciously introduced into relationship with Himself and, at the same time, it presents a most humiliating picture of the enormities of which human nature is capable.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the Lord your God."

Here we have the foundation of the entire superstructure of moral conduct which these chapters present.

Israel's actings were to take their character from the fact that the Lord was their GOD. They were called to comport themselves in a manner worthy of so high and holy a position. It was GOD's prerogative to set forth the special character and line of conduct becoming a people with whom He was pleased to associate His name. Hence the frequency of the expressions:

- **"I am the Lord."**
- **"I Am the Lord your God."**
- **"I the Lord your God am holy."**

The Lord was their GOD, and He was holy; hence, therefore, they were called to be holy likewise. His name was invoked in their character and acting.

This is the true principle of holiness for the people of GOD in all ages. They are to be governed and characterized by the revelation which He has made of Himself. Their conduct is to be founded upon what He is, not upon what they are in themselves. This entirely sets aside the principle expressed in the words, **"Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou;"** a principle so justly repudiated by every sensitive mind. It is not a comparison of one man with another; but a simple statement of the line of conduct which GOD looks for in those who belong to Him.

"After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do; and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do; neither shall ye walk in their ordinances."

The Egyptians and the Canaanites were all wrong. How was Israel to know this? Who told them? How came they to be right, and all besides wrong? These are interesting inquiries; and the answer is as simple as the questions are interesting. The Lord's Word was the standard by which all questions of right and wrong were to be definitely settled in the judgment of every member of the Israel of GOD. It was not, by any means, the judgment of an Israelite in opposition to the judgment of an Egyptian or of a Canaanite; but it was the judgment of GOD above all. Egypt might have her practices and her opinions, and so might Canaan; but Israel were to have the opinions and practices laid down in the Word of GOD.

"Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments; which, if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord."

It will be well for my reader to get a clear, deep, full, practical sense of this truth. The Word of GOD must settle every question and govern every conscience. There must be no appeal from its solemn and weighty decision. When GOD speaks, every heart must bow. Men may form and hold their opinions; they may adopt and defend their practices; but one of the finest traits in the character of **"the Israel of God"** is profound reverence for, and implicit subjection to, **"every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord."** The exhibition of this valuable feature may, perhaps, lay them open to the charge of dogmatism, superciliousness, and self-sufficiency, on the part of those who have never duly weighed the matter; but, in truth, nothing can be more unlike dogmatism than simple subjection to the plain truth of GOD; nothing more unlike superciliousness than reverence for the statements of inspiration; nothing more unlike self-sufficiency than subjection to the divine authority of Holy Scripture.

True, there will ever be the need of carefulness as to the tone and manner in which we set forth the authority for our convictions and our conduct. It must be made manifest, so far as it may be, that we are wholly governed, not by our own opinions, but by the Word of GOD. There is great danger of attaching an importance to an opinion merely because we have adopted it. This must be carefully guarded against. Self may creep in and display its deformity in the defense of our opinions as much as in anything else; but we must disallow it, in every shape and form, and be governed, in all things, by "**Thus saith the Lord.**"

But, then, we are not to expect that everyone will be ready to admit the full force of the divine statutes and judgments.

It is as persons walk in the integrity and energy of the divine nature that the Word of GOD will be owned, appreciated, and revered.

An Egyptian or a Canaanite would have been wholly unable to enter into the meaning or estimate the value of these statutes and judgments, which were to govern the conduct of the circumcised people of GOD; but that did not, in any wise, affect the question of Israel's obedience. They were brought into a certain relationship with the Lord, and that relationship had its distinctive privileges and responsibilities. "**I am the Lord your God.**" This was to be the ground of their conduct. They were to act in a way worthy of the One who had become their GOD, and made them His people. It was not that they were a whit better than other people. By no means. The Egyptians or Canaanites might have considered that the Israelites were setting themselves up as something superior in refusing to adopt the habits of either nation. But, no; the foundation of their peculiar line of conduct and tone of morality was laid in these words, "**I am the Lord your God.**"

In this great and practically-important fact, the Lord set before His people a ground of conduct which was immovable, and a standard of morality which was as elevated, and as enduring, as the eternal throne itself.

The moment He entered into a relationship with a people, their ethics were to assume a character and tone worthy of Him. It was no longer a question as to what they were, either in themselves or in comparison with others; but of what GOD was in comparison with all. This makes a material difference. To make self the ground of action or the standard of ethics is not only presumptuous folly, but it is sure to set one upon a descending scale of action. If self be my object, I must, of necessity, sink lower and lower every day; but if, on the other hand, I set the Lord before me, I shall rise higher and higher as, by the power of the Holy Ghost, I grow in conformity to that perfect model which is unfolded to the gaze of faith in the sacred pages of inspiration. I shall, undoubtedly, have to prostrate myself in the dust, under a sense of how infinitely short I come of the mark set before me; but, then, I can never consent to the setting up of a lower standard, nor can I ever be satisfied until I am conformed in all things to Him who was my substitute on the Cross, and is my Model in the glory.

Having said thus much on the main principle of the section before us - a principle of unspeakable importance to Christians, in a practical point of view - I feel it needless to enter into anything like a detailed exposition of statutes which speak for themselves in most obvious terms.

I would merely remark that those statutes range themselves under two distinct heads, namely:

- first, those which set forth the shameful enormities which the human heart is capable of devising; and,
- secondly, those which exhibit the exquisite tenderness and considerate care of the GOD of Israel.

As to the first, it is manifest that the Spirit of GOD could never enact laws for the purpose of preventing evils that have no existence. He does not construct a dam where there is no flood to be resisted. He does not deal with abstract ideas, but with positive realities. Man is, in very deed, capable of perpetrating each and every one of the shameful crimes referred to in this most faithful section of the book of Leviticus. If he were not, Why should he be told not to do so. Such a code would be wholly unsuitable for angels, inasmuch as they are incapable of committing the sins referred to; but it suits man, because he has gotten the seeds of those sins in his nature.

This is deeply humbling. It is a fresh declaration of the truth that man is a total wreck. From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, there is not so much as a single speck of moral soundness, as looked at in the light of the divine presence. The being for whom the Lord thought it needful to write Leviticus 18 - 20 must be a vile sinner; but that being is man - the writer and reader of these lines. How plain it is, therefore, that "**they that are in the flesh cannot please God**" (Romans 8).

Thank GOD, the believer is "**not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.**" He has been taken completely out of his old creation standing, and introduced into the new creation, in which the moral evils aimed at in this our section can have no existence. True, he has gotten the old nature; but it is his happy privilege to "**reckon**" it as a dead thing, and to walk in the abiding power of the new creation, wherein "**all things are of God.**" This is Christian liberty - even liberty to walk up and down in that fair creation where no trace of evil can ever be found; hallowed liberty to walk in holiness and purity before GOD and man; liberty to tread those lofty walks of personal sanctity whereon the beams of the divine countenance ever pour themselves in living luster.

Reader, this is Christian liberty. It is liberty, not to commit sin, but to taste the celestial sweets of a life of true holiness and moral elevation. May we prize more highly than we have ever done this precious boon of Heaven - Christian liberty!

And, now, one word as to the second class of statutes contained in our section - namely, those which so touchingly bring out divine tenderness and care.

Take the following: "**and when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God**" (Leviticus 19:9, 10).

This ordinance will meet us again in Leviticus 23, but there we shall see it in its dispensational bearing. Here, we contemplate it morally, as unfolding the precious grace of Israel's GOD. He would think of "**the poor and stranger;**" and He would have His people think of them likewise.

When the golden sheaves were being reaped, and the mellow clusters gathered, "the poor and stranger" were to be remembered by the Israel of GOD, because the Lord was the GOD of Israel. The reaper and the grape-gatherer were not to be governed by a spirit of grasping covetousness, which would bare the corners of the field and strip the branches of the vine, but rather by a spirit of large-hearted, genuine benevolence, which would leave a sheaf and a cluster **"for the poor and stranger,"** that they, too, might rejoice in the unbounded goodness of Him whose paths drop fatness, and on whose open hand all the sons of want may confidently wait.

The Book of Ruth furnishes a fine example of one who fully acted out this most benevolent statute.

"And Boaz said unto her (Ruth), At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed and left. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: and let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not" (Ruth 2:14-16).

Most touching and beautiful grace! Truly, it is good for our poor selfish hearts to be brought in contact with such principles and such practices. Nothing can surpass the exquisite refinement of the Words, **"let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her."**

It was, evidently, the desire of this noble Israelite that **"the stranger"** might have abundance, and have it, too, rather as the fruit of her own gleaning than of his benevolence. This was the very essence of refinement. It was putting her in immediate connection with, and dependence upon, the GOD of Israel, who had fully recognized and provided for **"the gleaner."** Boaz was merely acting out that gracious ordinance of which Ruth was reaping the benefit. The same grace that had given him the field gave her the gleanings. They were both debtors to grace. She was the happy recipient of the Lord's goodness. He was the honoured exponent of the Lord's most gracious institution. All was in most lovely moral order. The creature was blessed and GOD was glorified. Who would not own that it is good for us to be allowed to breathe such an atmosphere?

Let us now turn to another statute of our section. **"Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob Him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning"** (Leviticus 19:13).

What tender care is here! The High and Mighty One that inhabiteth eternity can take knowledge of the thoughts and feelings that spring up in the heart of a poor labourer. He knows and takes into account the expectations of such an one in reference to the fruit of his day's toil. The wages will, naturally, be looked for. The labourer's heart counts upon them; the family meal depends upon them. Oh! let them not be held back. Send not the labourer home with a heavy heart, to make the heart of his wife and family heavy likewise. By all means, give him that for which He has wrought, to which he has a right, and on which his heart is set. He is a husband, he is a father; and he has borne the burden and heat of the day that his wife and children may not go hungry to bed. Disappoint him not. Give him his due. Thus does our GOD take notice of the very throbbings of the labourer's heart, And make provision for his rising expectations. Precious grace! Most tender, thoughtful, touching, condescending love! The bare contemplation of such

statutes is sufficient to throw one into a flood of tenderness. Could any one read such passages and not be melted? Could any one read them and thoughtlessly dismiss a poor labourer, not knowing whether he and his family have wherewithal to meet the cravings of hunger?

Nothing can be more painful to a tender heart than the lack of kindly consideration for the poor, so often manifested by the rich. These latter can sit down to their sumptuous repast after dismissing from their door some poor industrious creature who had come seeking the just reward of his honest labour. They think not of the aching heart with which that man returns to his family, to tell them of the disappointment to himself and to them. Oh! it is terrible. It is most offensive to GOD, and to all who have drunk, in any measure, into His grace.

If we would know what GOD thinks of such acting, we have only to hearken to the following accents of holy indignation: "**Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them that have reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth**" (James 5:4).

"**The Lord of Sabaoth**" hears the cry of the aggrieved and disappointed labourer. His tender love tells itself forth in the institutions of His moral government; and even though the heart should not be melted by the grace of those institutions, the conduct should, at least, be governed by the righteousness thereof. GOD will not suffer the claims of the poor to be heartlessly tossed aside by those who are so hardened by the influence of wealth as to be insensible to the appeals of tenderness, and who are so far removed beyond the region of personal need as to be incapable of feeling for those whose lot it is to spend their days amid exhausting toil or pinching poverty. The poor are the special objects of GOD's care. Again and again He makes provision for them in the statutes of His moral administration; and it is particularly declared of Him who shall, ere long, assume, in manifested glory, the reins of government, that "**He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence; and precious shall their blood be in his sight**" (Psalm 72:12-14).

May we profit by the review of those precious and deeply practical truths! May our hearts be affected, and our conduct influenced by them.

We live in a heartless world; and there is a vast amount of selfishness in our own hearts. We are not sufficiently affected by the thought of the need of others. We are apt to forget the poor in the midst of our abundance. We often forget that the very persons whose labour ministers to our personal comfort are living, it may be, in the deepest poverty. Let us think of these things. Let us beware of "**grinding the faces of the poor.**" If the Jews of old were taught by the statutes and ordinances of the Mosaic economy, to entertain kindly feelings toward the poor, and to deal tenderly and graciously with the sons of toil, how much more ought the higher and more spiritual ethics of the Gospel dispensation produce in the hearts and lives of Christians a large-hearted benevolence toward every form of human need.

True, there is an urgent need of prudence and caution, lest we take a man out of the honourable position in which he was designed and fitted to move - namely, a position of dependence upon the fruits, the precious and fragrant fruits, of honest industry. This would be a grievous injury instead of a benefit. The example of Boaz should instruct in this matter. He allowed Ruth to

glean; but he took care to make her gleaning profitable. This is a very safe and a very simple principle. GOD intends that man should work at something or another, and we run counter to Him when we draw our fellow out of the place of dependence upon the results of patient industry, into that of dependence upon the results of false benevolence. The former is as honourable and elevating as the latter is contemptible and demoralizing. There is no bread so sweet to the taste as that which is nobly earned; but then those who earn their bread should get enough. A man will feed and care his horses; how much more his fellow, who yields him the labour of his hands from Monday morning till Saturday night.

But, some will say, "There are two sides to this question." Unquestionably there are; and, no doubt, one meets with a great deal amongst the poor which is calculated to dry up the springs of benevolence and genuine sympathy. There is much which tends to steel the heart, and close the hand; but, one thing is certain - it is better to be deceived in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred than to shut up the bowels of compassion against a single worthy object. Your heavenly Father causes His sun to shine upon the evil and on the good; and sendeth rain upon the just and upon the unjust. The sure sunbeams that gladden the heart of some devoted servant of CHRIST are poured upon the path of some ungodly sinner; and the self-same shower that falls upon the tillage of a true believer, enriches also the furrows of some blaspheming infidel.

This is to be our model. "**Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect**" (Matthew 5:48). It is only as we set the Lord before us, and walk in the power of His grace, that we shall be able to go on, from day to day, meeting with a tender heart and an open hand every possible form of human misery. It is only as we ourselves are drinking at the exhaustless fountain of divine love and tenderness, that we shall be able to go on ministering to human need unchecked by the oft-repeated manifestation of human depravity. Our tiny springs would soon be dried up were they not maintained in unbroken connection with that ever-gushing source.

The statute which next presents itself for our consideration, exemplifies, most touchingly, the tender care of the GOD of Israel.

"Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord" (Ver. 14).

Here, a barrier is erected to stem the rising tide of irritability with which uncontrolled nature would be almost sure to meet the personal infirmity of deafness. How well we can understand this! Nature does not like to be called upon to repeat its words, again and again, in order to meet the deaf man's infirmity. The Lord thought of this, and provided for it. And what is the provision? "**Thou shalt fear thy God.**" When tried by a deaf person, remember the Lord, and look to Him for Grace to enable you to govern your temper.

The second part of this statute reveals a most humiliating amount of wickedness in human nature. The idea of laying a stumbling-block in the way of the blind, is about the most wanton cruelty imaginable; and yet man is capable of it, else he would not be warned against it. No doubt, this, as well as many other statutes, admits of a spiritual application; but that in nowise interferes with the plain literal principle set forth in it. Man is capable of placing a stumbling block in the way of a fellow-creature afflicted with blindness. Such is man! Truly, the Lord knew

what was in man when He wrote the statutes and judgments of the Book of Leviticus.

I shall leave my reader to meditate alone upon the remainder of our section. He will find that each statute teaches a double lesson - namely, a lesson with respect to nature's evil tendencies, and also a lesson as to the Lord's tender care. *

* Verses 16 and 17 demand special attention. "**Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people.**" This is a most seasonable admonition for the people of GOD, in every age. A talebearer is sure to do incalculable mischief. It has been well remarked that a talebearer injures three persons - he injures himself, he injures his hearer, and he injures the subject of his tale. This he does directly; and as to the indirect consequences, who can recount them? Let us carefully guard against this horrible evil. May we never suffer a tale to, pass our lips; and let us never stand to hearken to a talebearer. May we always know how to drive away a backbiting tongue with an angry countenance, as the north wind driveth away rain.

In verse 17, we learn what ought to take the place of tale bearing. "**thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.**" In place of carrying to another a tale about my neighbour, I am called upon to go directly to himself and rebuke him, if there is anything wrong. This is the divine method. Satan's method is to act the talebearer.

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