

**Be Holy for I AM Holy Series**  
***Sacrifices and the Savior***

Leviticus 1:1-17

Old Testament Sermon Series on Leviticus

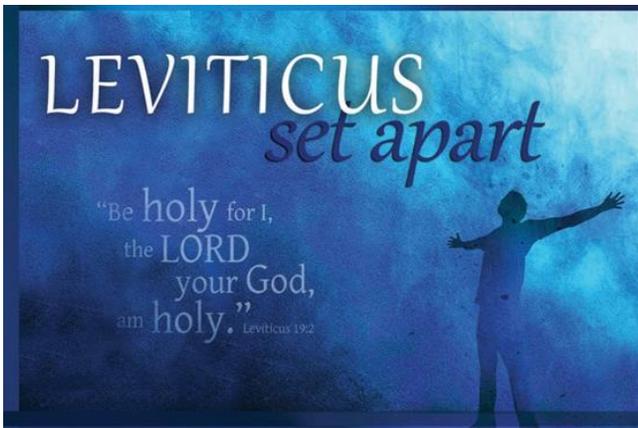
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

September 13, 2015

**TEXTS:** Leviticus 1:1-17

We continue this morning in our series on the Book of Leviticus, the third book of the Bible. The Bible begins with Genesis, the sweeping narrative of God's activity to build a family of faith. In



Exodus, He redeems His family from repression in Egypt, and in Leviticus, He calls to His family. He speaks to us tenderly. There is no geographical movement, no historical time progression, in this book. It is one long conversation that starts in Leviticus 1 and ends in Numbers 10. What does God speak in Leviticus throughout this whole narrative? It is in this book that God speaks to us that He is holy, and He calls us, as His people, to be holy,

to belong to Him, that we are to be a people set apart for God. God calls us into His presence, dwelling in the midst of us as a holy God.

This morning, we want to look at the first part of this great portion of God's Word. Leviticus 1-7 describes a system of worship, a sacrificial system, a system of offerings that need to be seen as a whole. I know for many readers of the Bible who commit to read through the Bible, this is the point where many stop. They get stuck right here, and they don't understand it. I want to sympathize with you at one level, but at the same time, I want to affirm in your presence that God is the One who chooses what we need to hear the most. In preparing for this series, I found myself reading through the whole Book of Leviticus in one sitting many times. It takes a little over an hour to read through the 27 chapters, and, as I got more familiar with these initial chapters, I found myself realizing that I need these chapters, and you need these chapters because these chapters teach us something that is life-giving and vital for us in our worshiping life with the living God. These chapters answer a question that we are often hesitant or even unaware to ask: "How is it possible for a holy God to dwell in the midst of an unholy people? How can the presence of God be near you, be near me, without destroying us?" The answer is in Leviticus 1-7. It is a system of atonement, of sacrifice for sin, that makes it possible for God to

dwell among us. Keep your Bible open as we look at Leviticus 1-7. Though this may seem strange and distant to us in many ways, on closer reflection, these chapters reveal to us a pattern of worship that should be the very rhythm of our own heart. It is a pattern of worship that will lead us directly to our Savior Jesus Christ in the end. Let's look together at this system. We need to see it as a whole, not in just one piece or one detail. Leviticus 1-7 gives us a set of offerings. Each chapter is devoted to a different one. From our text this morning, Leviticus 1 presents to us the burnt offering, and what we learn of the burnt offering will be true of the other offerings which we will look at in a little less detail.

In Leviticus 1:1-2, the Lord calls and speaks about when we bring an offering:

*"The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting. He said, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: "When you bring an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock."'"*

We notice right at the beginning that these offerings are voluntary; they are spontaneous. It says: "When you bring. . . when the occasion comes about that an offering is brought to the Lord." Notice also the word *offering*, when you bring an offering. In the Hebrew expression, the verb is together with a cognate accusative, literally *to offer an offering*. It is to *come near* with your gift before God. It is an expression of worship, as we will see. When this happens, the Lord teaches us that this offering, if it is from the herd, is to be a male without defect. The offerings that we give to God throughout Leviticus are our very best, and that is extremely important. Often times we find that our zeal, our love for God, is not white-hot as we want it to be. Too often we offer to God less than our very best. This is extremely important, as Leviticus unfolds. We offer to God our best, a male without defect. You can't have something born into your herd and say: "This animal has a broken leg, this animal cannot benefit me in any way so I will just give that to God." You can't do that with God and expect that relationship to flourish. You can't do that with your family members and expect those relationships to flourish. Around our house, we call those gifts 'floaters.' Have you ever been given a floater or received a floater? I'm not talking about white elephants which are deliberate, intentional floaters. I'm talking about gifts that you were given that you didn't care for, and you wondered: "What am I going to do with this? Oh, I know who I can give it to," and you just floated it down. That is not to be our pattern of worship to Almighty God. It is without defect, and it is presented at the entrance to the tent in Leviticus 1:3:

*"If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that you may be acceptable to the LORD."*

This offering is brought to the threshold of God's dwelling place "so that you may be acceptable to the Lord." God teaches His people right from the beginning that these offerings cause us to

stand in a posture of acceptance before Almighty God. How is that possible? We see in Leviticus 1:4:

*“You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.”*

It happens that the animal is brought to the entrance of the tent, and we are to lay our hands on the head of this burnt offering. There is a transfer of something onto this animal that is offered to God. We find out what it is in the second half the verse. There is a physical laying on of hands, a transfer of our sinfulness onto this offering, and we are accepted before God. Notice the expression “to make atonement for you.” The sacrificial system that God instructs for His people is one that visibly reminds them daily of their need for an atoning sacrifice. As strange as this may seem to us, this is critical information for you to have. If you try to relate to God without this information, you will not know Him, and you will not know yourself.

At the heart of Israel's life of worship is this system of offering an offering for forgiveness of sins. No other nation in antiquity or in the present has this concept. It is unique to Israel. Israel was told: “Do not imitate the practices of Egypt where you are coming from, and do not imitate the practices of the land of Canaan where I am taking you. You are to be set apart, belong to God, because there is no one like God.” There is no God holy like God. At the center of Israel's worship is the astonishing declaration that to relate to God, you must come with an offering that produces forgiveness of sins, because the God of the Bible is holy and righteous in all His ways. There is no other God like that. In ancient Egypt where Israel had come from, the Egyptian religious mentality was that of a civil religion, in large measure. Herman Te Velde writes:

*“The aim of worship was to come into contact with the gods to satisfy, to please and honor, and to appease them if necessary, or in exceptional cases, to forestall them or to ward them off. It would be most unwise to neglect and forget gods. If the gods were not worshiped, they would leave Egypt, and cosmic disasters would occur. The state would fall apart and be destroyed by enemies and rebels. Individuals would become the victims of illness and premature death.”*

Egypt, where Israel came from, had gods that were worshiped as part of the civil religion to establish the stability of society. The gods Abraham had been called out of on the other side of Israel in Mesopotamia held the view of the gods and of worship that said: “If you do enough right, if you make enough offerings, then maybe you will be accepted before God.” It was a religion of fear. Scholar F. Wiggerman writes:

*“Fundamental to Mesopotamian theology was its definition of the place of human beings in the world; the gods created the world for their own benefit and created humanity to serve them. Great gods had lesser gods dig rivers, canals, and build their houses. Lesser*

gods rebelled, went on strike, and mankind was made for their role. Human existence depended on the satisfaction of the gods, the gods depended on human servants for their leisured life, whose performance they closely monitored. Failure to worship the gods was high treason, it jeopardized peace, prosperity, and life. The ritual worship provided the gods with shelter and food, temple and offerings. Satisfactory service was rewarded with prosperity and a long life; failure was punished with adversity, disease, and an untimely death.”

As different as this may seem, these two paradigms are around us. Some of us imagine that worshiping God is just part of our cultural identity. I am an American, so I give lip service to God so that things go well for my country. Others relate to God in a more personal posture, like the ancient Mesopotamians: a deep fear. I've got to do right or God is going to strike me down. These very different views can be contrasted with what God instructs His people in Leviticus 1-7. God shows us in Leviticus 1-7 that He is holy; He is righteous. It is true that a holy God could not dwell with unholy people except for the provision of blood atonement, and God makes a path for forgiveness of sins. No one else in antiquity, or in this very moment, can answer the longing of the human heart for relationship with God and give the answer for how that is possible. It is possible through atonement. Forgiveness is made possible.

In Leviticus 1, this system is largely symbolic. You cannot buy forgiveness. God makes provision for different levels of wealth within society. If you can afford a bull, you give a bull. If you can afford just a sheep or goat, you give a sheep or goat. If you cannot afford anything but just a wild bird caught in a trap, then that is your offering. It is a symbolic system offered to God. The **burnt offering** burns continuously on the altar. Every morning, every evening, one is given voluntarily by a member of the community, and atonement is made. Israel's life begins at the altar and begins with atonement.

Leviticus 2 continues with the **grain offering**. We read in Leviticus 2:1:

*“When anyone brings a grain offering to the LORD, your offering is to be of the finest flour.”*

Again, you bring your very best. The grain offering is described as a gift, as an expression of thanksgiving. When you bring the grain offering to God, something very different happens than with the burnt offering. The burnt offering is placed on the altar, and it is fully consumed. The grain offering is given to God. The priests take just a symbolic handful offered on the altar, and the rest of the grain offering the priests eat. People need to eat to live. The life of Israel's worshiping community is dependent on the response of the people with thanksgiving. The priest takes a handful and offers it together with incense on the altar. Then, we read in Leviticus 2:3 that:

*“The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the food offering presented to the LORD.”*

Aaron and his sons eat and are satisfied and sustained. The priesthood in ancient Israel has no land, unlike the priesthods of Egypt or Mesopotamia, or some corrupt versions of priests in the Middle Ages. Israel’s priests are not benefiting economically from their role. But, in a very concrete way, they survive on the generosity and the thanksgiving of God's people. So, we see in chapter 2 this beginning of the rhythm: atonement for sin leads to thanksgiving and a gift in response.

Leviticus 3 narrates for us the next offering in this great system of praise. The next offering is variously translated as a **peace offering** in some versions. Some versions say a *well-being offering*; the NIV translates this as a *fellowship offering*. This offering is called after the Hebrew word *shalom*, a peace offering. When you are in *shalom*, you are in a state of well-being, but you are also in a state of relationship with someone. The peace offering in Leviticus 3 is an offering for communion and fellowship with Almighty God. When Israel's peace offering is brought, there is just a portion of the offering that is placed on the altar, and the vast majority of the peace offering is eaten by the priests and the worshiper. This means that most of the peace offering, most of the fellowship offering, is brought to God's house. A portion is given to Him as a symbolic gesture of praise, and the rest of it you eat, and I eat, together with God. It’s amazing! This is the pattern of worship in ancient Israel: atonement for sins, thanksgiving, and fellowship or communion. No one else has a system that says: “I am in relationship with God by blood atonement, and in response to that my heart bursts into thanksgiving and praise, and in result to that thanksgiving and praise, I eat and fellowship with God.” We use that language often: to have a relationship with God, and yet that relationship is expressed in a very concrete way of eating together with Almighty God. This is remarkable—the system of offerings designed to communicate and sustain relationship with God.

There are two more offerings given in Leviticus 4 and 5. These are called the **sin offering** and the **guilt offering**. These offerings share a remarkable feature. In Leviticus 4:2, we hear that the Lord speaks to Israel through Moses, and He says:

*“When anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them . . .”*

The result is that he is to bring a sin offering. It is amazing that God says that He makes provision for accidental, unintentional sins. Let me give you an example. You have a friend in ancient Israel, Simeon. He invites you over, he needs some help to chop wood out behind his house. He gives you his best ax, treating you with deference as his invited guest and co-laborer. You start chopping the wood, but he didn't tell you that the ax head was a little loose and to be careful. As you come back, ready to make an impressive blow, the ax head flies off, strikes

Judah who is standing behind you and kills him. What do you do? It is unintentional, accidental, not premeditated, so you bring a sin offering. Leviticus 4 and 5 describe that these are not voluntary offerings, but these are required offerings for inadvertent, accidental sins of ignorance, sins of omission, things that we failed to do, or an act that brings harm. I flew out to Boston on Friday and was able to teach the incoming class of at Gordon Conwell for several hours. It was a moving time. When I flew out, I ended up sitting next to a young woman who was a Harvard grad, culturally Hindu, but not practicing. We ended up talking about Christ for hours on the flight. At one point she said, "You're not really convincing me." I said, "Well, I'm not really trying to." She said, "I don't think that religion matters because you can't know this with 100% certainty." I said to her, "You know, you don't live that way. If you lived that way, you couldn't have any relationships. Imagine saying I can't enter into relationship with you unless I know 100% everything about you." She was an accomplished violinist, and I said, "You would never have studied violin if you had heard someone play the violin beautifully and thought initially, 'I could never play like that. I'm not even going to start.' Isn't there joy in getting to know the instrument? Isn't there joy in getting to know the person?" I then said to her, "Knowing God is both satisfying and joyful, and you can know with certainty." Then, to the other side of me, was John McCain, and I had a brief exchange with John McCain. I had Leviticus 1-7 going through my mind the whole time, and I thought: "This is true for everyone. It is true for a student; it is true for a senator." Leviticus 4 says that the sin offering, the guilt offering, must be offered by all levels of society. Leviticus 4:3 says:

***"If it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull of the herd without blemish as a sin offering to the LORD."***

Leviticus 4:13-14 says:

***"If the whole congregation of Israel errs unintentionally . . . the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting."***

Leviticus 4:22 says:

***"When a ruler sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done and incurs guilt, . . . he shall bring as his offering a male goat without blemish."***

Leviticus 4:27 says:

***"If anyone of the ordinary people among you sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done and incurs guilt, . . . you shall bring a female goat without blemish as your offering."***

Isn't it glorious that the God of Israel makes economic provision for diversity within the society, and then says emphatically that there is no social status that you can occupy that exempts you

from the requirement of atonement! Praise God, there is none like the God of Israel! The sin offering, the guilt offering, are both described for these unintentional sins. Leviticus 5:15 says:

*“When any of you commit a trespass and sin unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD, you shall bring a ram. . . , as your guilt offering to the LORD.”*

You may be asking yourself: “What do I do with an intentional, flagrant sin?” The Hebrew expression for this is *with a high hand*. What do you do when you make a plan to kill someone, and you take their life? The only method of forgiveness is to plead for the mercy of God. There is no cheap grace in the Old or New Testament. Forgiveness is through blood atonement. The God of the Bible desires us to receive this gift of blood atonement, to respond with thanksgiving, and to enter into communion and fellowship with Him.

Leviticus 6 and 7 describe the practice of these offerings and give in more detail how the offerings are actually made, that which is eaten, and that which is consumed on the altar. I want you to see that we need these chapters. As foreign as they seem, as strange as they seem. God says: “Let Me slow you down and tell you in these first seven chapters, that for Me to relate to you, there has got to be atonement. We need that, and as terrifying as that might seem, or as insulting as it might seem to say to someone, “You know, you need forgiveness to relate to God?” that is the first thing that we need to be told. It may hurt our ego, it may lower our pride, but in reality, those are good things to get rid of. I want you to see that there is a revelation of God that is beautiful here. It is a revelation of God's holiness, His moral perfection, and His gracious provision that we would belong to Him.

I want to apply this system of offerings in three different ways. The tabernacle, and the later temple, were divided into these three grades of holiness: the outer court, the holy place, and the holy of holies. I want these applications to go together from the outer court, to the holy place, and to the holy of holies. I want you to see what I have seen in these chapters, and that is this life-giving rhythm: what Christian worship is about. What is the worship of ancient Israel about? What does it mean to relate to God? It means to relate to Him in this holy, sacred rhythm of atonement for sins, thanksgiving in response, and communion. Put in another way, the rhythm of Christian worship is the rhythm of Israel's worship. It is the rhythm of forgiveness, and gratitude, and fellowship. It is the rhythm of a gracious provision, of a fitting response, and of genuine celebration. This is a covenant relationship with God. It is a pattern of worship that is celebrated in Scripture. Listen to Psalm 5:3:

*“O LORD, in the morning You hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for You.”*

Psalm 27:6 says:

*“I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.”*

In Psalm 54:6-7, we read:

*“With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, O LORD, for it is good. For He has delivered me from every trouble.”*

There are dozens of passages that describe the worshiping life of God's people as a life of joy, real joy, and it is a joy that is on this sacred rhythm.

Let's move a little closer in to the holy place. When coming to the holy place, we see that the worship we bring to God is our very best. I mentioned earlier that God doesn't need our money. He doesn't need our offering, but He knows us well enough to know that we need to give Him our very best. The Lord makes provision economically for these different costs. As a quick aside, I think it is profound for us to observe in Luke 2 that when Joseph and Mary bring the Infant Jesus to the Temple, they bring the offering of the poor. When God came into the world as a Man, He was born and raised into a poor family. Joseph and Mary offer the birds, not the bull, not the goat. They offer the birds, the lowest cost. Yet it would be wrong for those who can afford a bull, a goat, or a sheep to offer birds. I want to press on us a little bit, because American Christians, and I am not speaking to anyone in particular here, but I want us to hear this. I've got to hear this. I want to give God my best. We are a tithing family, not because people pound on us saying we have to tithe, but because that is the first gift I give a month, and I love to do it. I've been doing that for almost 20 years. I did that when I made almost nothing as a college student, and I love doing it now. It's a rhythm of saying: "I'm giving God the best; God is my first priority." I know a few of you here who have animal herds and flocks, but most of you work regular jobs. Most of us receive compensation for that in hard currency. Some of you may barter or exchange services, but for most of us, that's our economic life. King David said in 2 Samuel 24:24:

*“I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.”*

The Lord says in Deuteronomy 16:16 concerning Israel:

*“They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.”*

Exodus 23:15 says:

*“None shall appear before Me empty-handed.”*

We offer God our very best, and for most of us, that translates into a generosity of giving that not only sustains the ministry here, and that's good and important, but actually my heart for the generosity of this church is for the discipleship implications in our own lives. That is the rationale in Scripture. In our offerings, we express dependence on God for our entire life. In our offerings, we give partially back to God what we have received entirely from God. The New Testament asks: "What do you have that you haven't received?" In fact, we have received everything that we have, and so we give back to God a portion of it. When you give back to God

a portion, something amazing happens: it sanctifies all the rest. If you were to ask Americans of every income level, "What do you need?" statistically, in every income bracket, Americans say: "I need just 10% more and I'll be happy." Isn't it profound that God says it is good for your soul to give to God first, and then it sanctifies the rest. We sanctify and consecrate the rest, and something else happens. The rest, the 90% that we live on, is lived out in a way that is more deliberate and intentionally for God, which is what we really want in the end. The system of sacrifice and offering requires our very best to God first.

Let's move from the holy place now to the holy of holies. The system of sacrifices points us straight to Jesus Christ in the end. When we come inside the veil, when we move from the outer court, when we come inside the holy place, and we press in to that inner veil, the holy of holies, what do we find in the midst of the sanctuary? We find the truth that Isaiah 59:2-3 says:

*"Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."*

Yet God has made provision for atonement, and this happens daily in the burnt offering, a costly sacrifice. I want you to consider that Jesus Christ is our burnt offering. Jesus' death is expressed in the very language of the burnt offering throughout the New Testament. His work on the cross is explained as the burnt offering. Romans 3:24b-25 says:

*". . . through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation [an atoning sacrifice] by His blood, to be received by faith."*

This is the language used of the burnt offering. Jesus Christ, our burnt offering, is a Lamb without blemish and defect, like the burnt offering. 1 Peter 1:19 says we were redeemed:

*". . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."*

Jesus' offering of Himself upon the altar is described with that expression that is used three times in Leviticus 1 as *a fragrant aroma to God*. Ephesians 5:2 says:

*"Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

This is the language of the burnt offering. Jesus' offering of Himself is the ultimate expression of God's love. 1 John 4:10 says:

*"This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

The most memorable statement of the role of love in Christian faith is John 3:16:

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. . ."*

In this profound, decisive statement of truth echoes the language of the burnt offering. God's love was expressed for the world in the giving, and it is a giving of the offering of His one and

only Son, the Lamb without blemish. John Levinson, a Jewish professor of Bible at Harvard, not a Christian but a serious student of the Bible, sees this in a way that many Christians don't. John Levinson says:

“The way in which God is likely to have given (*edoken*) his son should not be missed. The nature of the ‘giving’ to which John 3:16 refers merits special emphasis, for among many Christians the tendency to sentimentalize the notion of love that pervades the New Testament is longstanding and powerful. So let it be said directly: the father’s gift that the Fourth Gospel has in mind is one that necessarily entails a bloody slaying of Jesus, very much along the lines of the paschal lamb that Jesus becomes and also supersedes. In John’s theology, the killing of Jesus, like that of the Passover offering, enables those marked for death to live nonetheless. In a sense, Jesus provides those who believe in him with immortality by dying in their stead.”

Jesus is your burnt offering. You don't know the work of Christ without Leviticus 1-7, and as difficult and obscure as these chapters might be, they actually set for you the pattern of rhythm that should shape your heart: blood atonement, glory, thanks to God, and fellowship with God. That is our life. You are called to give to God your very best. I am not pleading for money. That is not my job. I am pleading for God to be the height of your affections, and I plead that for your own good and joy.

Lastly, I want you to see that you are accepted before God on the basis of Jesus who gives His life as an offering, a burnt offering, for your forgiveness and mine. So, Christian faith confesses with boldness and truth:

“What can wash away my sin?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
What can make me whole again? (There’s the peace offering.)  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Israel's worship was conducted in a ritual sanctity. It wasn't wild and uncontrolled in the tabernacle. The offerings were slain in a very ritual manner, with care, minimizing the pain of the animals. Blood was collected in a ceremonious way and poured at the base of the altar. It wasn't out of control. It was God's design to show us: “What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” The song then responds with gratitude and praise and thanksgiving:

“O precious is the flow  
that makes me white as snow;  
no other fount I know;  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can for sin atone:  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.  
Naught of good that I have done:  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

I want to invite you to pray with me, and we are going to sing this together. I want you to sing with new love for Christ and what He has done for you and for me.

Amen