

Leviticus: Set Apart for God

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Lev. 19:2

Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

Pastor David Palmer

September 6-November 22, 2015

OVERVIEW: We turn our attention this fall to the Word of God in Leviticus. After the sweeping narratives of Genesis and epic redemption of Exodus, time slows down in Leviticus. God speaks in sacred time to teach us how he wants us to live. God calls to us from Mount Sinai: “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2). Our calling to “be holy” is rooted in conscious imitation of God’s character as holy. Holiness describes the beauty of God’s moral perfection. “The Holy One of Israel” is other, separate, and distinct. He is without equal, incomparable in power, mercy and steadfast, covenant-keeping love. For us, “to be holy” means to be set apart from the world so that we may belong to him. We are God’s treasured possession, a people reserved for his special use to reflect his glory on earth.

God’s purpose in the Exodus was to redeem a people who “will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:6). Leviticus describes the life of God’s priestly, holy people in practical terms. The first part of Leviticus is concerned with our life of worship. God’s people are taught that life begins at the altar. God’s people know that provision for the forgiveness of sins is made through substitutionary atonement. The second part of Leviticus is concerned with practical holiness. God’s people are to reflect him in the concrete realities of living. We are to “be holy” in our daily business practices, in what we eat, and even in our most intimate relationships. Our call to be holy is profoundly re-affirmed in the New Testament. Jesus summarizes our life of practical holiness by citing Leviticus 19:18: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Peter urges us not be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance, but “as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet 1:15). Paul likewise emphasizes that believes in Christ are to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy to God” (Rom 12:1). Every aspect of our lives belongs to God.

We need to hear God’s call to holiness today. We live in a society that has lost touch with the sacred. Believers in Christ often live in ways that are indistinguishable from the surrounding culture. I believe that we are most useful for the world when we are most dedicated to God. My prayer for this series is that we will rediscover our central identity and calling to be holy. In holiness, may God renew our life together and increase the urgency of our mission to a world in need of Christ. “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

CHURCH INTEGRATION: We will seek to integrate and apply the series with small group meetings during the week using *Be Holy: Becoming Set Apart for God* by Warren Wiersbe. We will encourage individuals to read the text of Leviticus and use the study guide for personal devotions. We will encourage the entire congregation to enter the living conversation of God with His people through Scripture and prayer.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY: Our memory verse for this series will be Leviticus 19:2: “Be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy.”

GRAPHIC DESIGN: The predominant colors of the series are blue and white which dominant the priestly garments in Israel. God calls us a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We are a people set apart, belonging to God, called to reflect the beauty of His holiness in lives of praise.

CREATIVE ARTS: We hope to incorporate creative arts in the series through music, original compositions, and fine arts.

WORSHIP EMPHASIS AND KEY HYMNS/PRAISE SONGS:

Holy, Holy, Holy
Take My Life and Let it Be Consecrated
Behold the Lamb
Lord, I Need You
Before the Throne of God Above

WEEK 1: September 6 Pastor David Palmer (Communion)
Title: “Be Holy For I AM Holy”
Text: Lev. 1:1-4; 9:7; 10:3; 11:44-45; 18:1-4; 19:1-2; 20:7-8; 20:26; 26:3-13
Theme: Introduction to the Series and Overview of Leviticus

Pastoral contact: In Leviticus, God calls to us: “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2). Our calling to “be holy” is lived in conscious imitation of God’s character as holy. Holiness describes the beauty of God’s moral perfection. The Holy One of Israel is other, separate, and distinct. He is without equal, incomparable in power, mercy and steadfast, covenant-keeping love. For us, “to be holy” means being set apart from the world so that we may belong to him. We are God’s treasured possession, a people reserved for his special use to reflect his glory on earth. We are to be holy in our daily business practices, in what we eat, and even in our most intimate relationships. I encourage you to turn your attention to this often-neglected portion of God’s Word as we grow in holiness at Kenwood this fall.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 1: “The Most Important Thing in the World” and 13: “Learning from Leviticus.”

WEEK 2: September 13 Pastor David Palmer
 Title: “The Sacrifices and the Savior”
 Text: Leviticus 1:1-17
 Theme: The Sacrificial System of Worship

Pastoral contact: We spend great energy seeking the acceptance of other people. In our most sincere moments, we wonder whether we are fully accepted before God. How can sinful humanity appear before a holy God? Leviticus 1-7 answers our longing for full acceptance with God’s gracious provision of forgiveness. In ancient Israel, life begins at the altar where forgiveness of sins is achieved through blood atonement. Although this portion of God’s Word seems strange to us and requires careful explanation, these chapters reveal a life giving aspect of worship that is celebrated through a series of different sacrificial offerings. These offerings provide forgiveness, express our gratitude, and provide occasion for communion with the living God. The entire system points forward to the person and work of Christ our Savior. I encourage you to read Leviticus 1-7 for Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 2: “The Sacrifices and the Savior.”

WEEK 3: September 20 Pastor Scott Burns
 Title: “A Kingdom of Priests”
 Text: Leviticus 9:1-24
 Theme: The ministry of the priesthood

Pastoral contact: Spiritual leadership really matters. God’s purpose in the Exodus was to redeem a people who “will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:6). This calling is reaffirmed in the New Testament in passages like 1 Peter 2:5, 9 and Revelation 1:6 and 5:10. Though the entire nation was to a kingdom of priests, the Lord set apart Aaron and his descendants alone to approach the altar. Israel’s priesthood was called to carry out the unique ministry in the sanctuary, to teach God’s people in the Scriptures, and to bless them in his name. The office of spiritual leadership was a great and sacred responsibility that required consecration and godly character. This Sunday we will hear the Word of God through Pastor Scott Burns. I encourage you to read Leviticus 8-10 and prepare your heart for this Sunday. Also, plan to attend a special time of hymn seeing and learning about Christ’s work in the Middle East today with Dr. Dan Chetti from the Arab Baptist Seminary in Lebanon in the chapel on Sunday night.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 3: “A Kingdom of Priests.”

WEEK 4: September 27 Pastor David Palmer
 Title: “Making Life-giving Distinctions”
 Text: Leviticus 11:1-25, 44-47
 Theme: The meaning of the dietary laws as being set apart for God

Pastoral contact: We need to be able to distinguish right from wrong when following God. As we have learned so far in Leviticus, “to be holy” means to be set apart, reserved for God’s use in the world. We will need to separate from the surrounding culture at certain points of lifestyle to obey God. One of the ways that God kept his people separate from the nations in the Old Testament was through a particular diet. This daily habit formed in them the ability to distinguish between themselves and the nations around them. The dietary laws do not apply in the same way in the New Covenant (Acts 10), yet they have much to teach us today about the care of our bodies and obeying God in the ordinary everyday patterns of life. I encourage you to read Leviticus 11 and prepare your heart for Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 4: “Cleanliness and Godliness”

WEEK 5: October 4 Pastor David Palmer (Communion)
 Title: “The Holiest Day of the Year”
 Text: Leviticus 16:1-34
 Theme: The Day of Atonement

Pastoral contact: Where do we find forgiveness? How do I know our sin is banished from God’s presence? The Day of Atonement was the most important day of the year in ancient Israel. On this single day, the high priest alone entered into God’s presence in the holy of holies to make atonement for the sin of the people. It was a divine appointment of the highest degree. In this carefully prescribed ritual, the Lord shows us how our sin is forgiven. We are given a powerful visual image in the scapegoat that “as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). Christians over the centuries have seen the work of Christ held in trust in this ceremony. I encourage you to read Leviticus 16 and prepare your heart for communion this Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 6: “Israel’s High and Holy Day”

WEEK 6: October 11 Pastor David Palmer
 Title: “Holy Sexuality”
 Text: Leviticus 18:1-24
 Theme: The holy use of our bodies

Pastoral contact: Our sexual lives are important to God. We often make two very different mistakes in this most intimate part of our lives. On the one hand, we view sexuality as a negative, unclean aspect of our lives. This is not the biblical view of the body or of intimacy. On the other hand, we view sexuality as an appetite that must be satisfied or the essential way to define our identity. This is a dangerous view of self that leads to disappointment. We will explore the rich biblical counsel of Leviticus 18 as God’s wisdom for a holy sexuality. God’s people are taught not imitate the society around us lest we self-destruct. This is one of the key Scriptural passages that help us navigate the context and implications of our current cultural debate on homosexuality. Please read Leviticus 18 in preparation for worship on Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 7: “Holiness Is a Practical Thing” (begin)

WEEK 7: October 18 Pastor David Palmer
 Title: “Practical Holiness”
 Text: Leviticus 19:1-18
 Theme: Holiness as the fulfillment of God’s will

Pastoral contact: Holiness affects every aspect of our lives. In Leviticus 19:2, the entire assembly of God’s people is called to “be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy.” This portion of God’s Word unfolds as an expansive commentary on the Ten Commandments. We see the very practical nature of holiness expressed as obedience to God in all areas of life. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus cites Leviticus 19:18 “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” as one of the two commands which summarize all of Scripture. I encourage you to read Leviticus 19 and prepare your hearts for worship on Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 7: “Holiness Is a Practical Thing” (complete)

WEEK 8: October 25 Pastor Scott Burns
 Title: “Spiritual Leadership”
 Text: Leviticus 21:1-8
 Theme: The characteristics of godly leadership

Pastoral contact: Leadership shapes the present and future of any organization. This is true in a family, school, business, or government. Israel’s spiritual leadership was called to reflect God’s character and live beyond reproach. Priests were called to holiness in their personal conduct, physical characteristics, and professional practice. This Sunday we will hear the Word of God through Pastor Scott Burns. I encourage you to read Leviticus 21-22 and prepare your heart for Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 8: “The Cost of Spiritual Leadership”

WEEK 9: November 1 Pastor David Palmer (Communion)
 Title: “Sacred Time”
 Text: Leviticus 23:1-6, 10, 15, 24, 27, 34, 37-38
 Theme: The worshipping rhythm of the year

Pastoral contact: Time is a precious commodity. One of the unexpected outcomes of modern life is that we all seem to have less time than ever. Technologies that promised to save time have in fact stolen it away. Many people today find themselves racing through life at a breathless pace, trying to create meaning in the fractured pieces of time in between distractions. God is the Author and Creator of time. He patterned creation with regular times and seasons (Gen. 1:14). The climax of his work was the Sabbath, a weekly rhythm to guard rest and leave time for worship. God gave Israel not only a weekly pattern of Sabbath, but also a yearly cycle to celebrate their identity. Christians today need to recover a sense of sacred time that both remembers and anticipates the future. I encourage you to read Leviticus 23 and prepare your heart for Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

“Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy” Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 9: “The Calendar That Tells the Future”

WEEK 10: November 8 Pastor David Palmer
Title: "The Holiness of God Among Us"
Text: Leviticus 24:1-23
Theme: The holiness of God

Pastoral contact: God has created speech in order to praise. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). The words of the seraphim remind us of the greatness of God dwelling in the midst of his people. God's presence is like a consuming fire. Leviticus 24 teaches us about the gift of God's presence signified through pure oil continuously burning in the tabernacle and the bread of God which is set forward each week. The ending of this chapter is a sober warning about the ultimate misuse of words to degrade the holiness of God's name. Jesus cautions us that we will give account "for every careless word" (Matt. 12:37). I encourage you to read Leviticus 24 and prepare your heart for Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

"Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy" Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 10: "Holy, Holy, Holy"

WEEK 11: November 15 Pastor David Palmer (Thanksgiving Lunch)
Title: "The Gift of God's Land"
Text: Leviticus 25:1-18
Theme: The holy land

Pastoral contact: God loves the earth. He has designed and created it to be inhabited (Isa. 45:18). He includes the land in Genesis among all that he calls "very good" (Gen. 1:31). A vital part of God's promise to Abraham is a land in which to live. As Israel prepares to enter God's promised land, the Lord provides concrete instructions about how we are care for the physical place in which we live. He cares about how we treat the land and those who are live and are employed upon it. I encourage you to read Leviticus 25 for Sunday and bring your appetite, as we will celebrate the goodness of God's harvest in a full Thanksgiving luncheon after second service.

Scripture Memory:

"Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy" Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 11: "This Land Is God's Land"

WEEK 12: November 22 Pastor Scott Burns
Title: "Blessings, Curses, and a Future"
Text: Leviticus 26:1-17, 31-34, 44-45
Theme: The holiness of God

Pastoral contact: Covenant treaties in the ancient world ended with a list of blessings and curses. There were rewards for obedience and punishments for disobedience. This pattern is reflected in God's covenant with His people. Keeping God's commands leads to blessing. Rejecting God's command brings judgment. What is unexpected in Leviticus is that God looks beyond our failure to fully obey him. Leviticus 26 anticipates the entire history of Israel in the land as one that will result in judgment. However, this judgment will prove to be divine discipline and not ultimate rejection. The Lord promises a future when his people will repent and confess their sins. Leviticus ends with hope and a future, God's coming future that will lead us into the Advent season. This Sunday we will hear the Word of God through Pastor Scott Burns. I encourage you to read Leviticus 26 and prepare your heart for worship on Sunday.

Scripture Memory:

"Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy" Leviticus 19:2

SMALL GROUP: *Be Holy*, by Warren Wiersbe 12: "The Big Word 'If'"

SERIES HYMN: "Take My Life And Let It Be" by Frances Havergal (1836-1879)

Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,
let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,
ever, only, all for thee.

Frances R. Havergal (b. Astley, Worcestershire, England, 1836; d. Oystermouth, Wales, 1879) originally composed her text as a hymn of “self-consecration to Christ” on February 4, 1874. She told the following story about writing this hymn:

I went for a little visit of five days [to Areley House, Worcestershire, in December 1873]. There were ten persons in the house, some unconverted and long prayed for, some converted but not rejoicing Christians. [God] gave me the prayer, “Lord, give me *all* this house.” And He just did! Before I left the house, everyone had got a blessing. The last night of my visit. . . I was too happy to sleep and passed most of the night in praise and renewal of my own consecration, and these little couplets formed themselves and chimed in my heart, one after another, till they finished with “Ever, only, all, for Thee.”

Although her formal education was sporadic because of poor health, Havergal learned six foreign languages, including Greek and Hebrew, and was well read in many subjects. She began writing poetry at an early age and was also an accomplished singer and pianist. The daughter of a clergyman, she had a conversion experience at the age of fourteen and was confirmed in the Church of England in 1853. Taking seriously her own words “take my silver and my gold,” she sent all her jewelry to the Church Mission Society to be sold. She also supported other charitable organizations. Her more than one hundred hymns were originally published in leaflets and later gathered into seven collections: *Ministry of Song* (1869), *Twelve Sacred Songs for Little Singers* (1870), *Under the Surface* (1874), *Loyal Responses* (1878), *Life Mosaic* (1879), *Life Chords* (1880), and *Life Echoes* (1883), as well as in one large volume, *Poetical Works* (1884).

CONVERSATION PARTNERS: (These are the major commentators I will use this series)

Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series (2014). Jay Sklar teaches Bible and is the Dean of the Faculty at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, MO. He is a close personal friend of the Palmer family, former classmate at Gordon-Conwell, and a Bible reader in our wedding. Not only is Jay a devastatingly quick ping-pong player, he is a great lover of God and His Word. He has devoted his academic career to helping people understand the meaning and relevance of Leviticus. His recent commentary is very accessible and highly recommended.

Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship* (2001). Tremper Longman serves as Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA. This study is a thoughtful reflection on how we see the person and work of Christ in the worshipping life of Israel in Leviticus. I recommend this book as a devotional read this fall.

Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* (2003). Baruch Levine is Professor of Biblical Studies at New York University. His Hebrew commentary on Leviticus is a model of concise, but learned commentary. He approaches the Scripture as a devout Jewish commentator. This is an important perspective for Christians who at times are hesitant to appreciate Leviticus on its own terms. This is more of an academic commentary, but one of the best.

Jacob Milgrom (AD 1923-2010), *Leviticus*. 3 volumes. Anchor Bible Series (1998-2001). Jacob Milgrom taught for several decades at the University of California, Berkeley as chair of Department of Near Eastern Studies. He devoted more than thirty years to the study of Leviticus and his expansive commentary in three volumes reflects the importance of Leviticus for a full understanding of the entire Bible. His work is very detailed, and rigorously academic, yet it is filled with moments of sympathetic insight and a wealth of comparative material from the ancient Near East and the history of biblical interpretation.

Other books that connect with this series are:

A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*

Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of An Unlikely Convert*

Rosaria Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*

Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*