

DOES THIS REALLY NEED TO BE SAID?

LEVITICUS 18:1-30

**SINCE WE LIVE IN SUCH A SEXUALLY PERVERTED CULTURE;
WE LIVE IN AN IDOLATROUS CULTURE.
WE MUST CONSTANTLY CHECK OURSELVES TO MAKE SURE
WE ARE NOT ALSO PERVERTED AND IDOLATROUS.**

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Does This Really Need To Be Said?

Leviticus 18:1-30

When I read through this passage, I said to myself, "Does this really need to be said?" Did God really have to tell the Israelites not to have sex with their mother or father, sister or brother, or with animals? After being in the ministry for so many years, and after really studying through this text, the answer is yes. God needed to say this to the Israelites and He needs to say it to us. Beyond the obvious lessons here about being sexually pure in every way, there is a more subtle lesson at work here as well. I don't think that I need to argue or prove that we live in a sexually immoral society. Every one of us have been touched and infected by it. But here is what is subtle and what we often miss. Any type of sexual immorality in God's kingdom is as bad as another. So the person, who commits adultery or has any sex outside of marriage, is just as disgusting as a person who is having sex with an animal.

Did you get that? Our society and I'm sure many of you would want to say that is absurd. But I think if you read and honestly listen for God's voice, you will come to see that any kind of sexual immorality is the same as committing idolatry. If we are idol worshipers, then there is no sin that is out of our reach. I'm going to flesh this out a little later in the sermon, but think about this. We know that child molesters don't do very well in prison, and I'm glad for that. But what I don't understand is this. There are men in prison who are murders that have killed entire families, have raped and killed women, and have had their girlfriends kill babies through abortion. Yet somehow these vile individuals think somehow that they are superior and more righteous than the child molester and find it their duty to punish them. Do you get the irony? These horrible men have abused hundreds of children through their behavior and yet find the child molester disgusting, and yet they themselves are raping young men in prison.

Our court system charges a murder twice if he kills a pregnant mother with child. They charge him with murdering the woman and they charge him with murdering the unborn baby. And yet this same court system permits women to kill their own unborn babies and call it women's rights.

The Bible is very clear about sexual immorality. And in several places describes how sexual immorality destroys communities. We can see the breakdown in society but what scares me is that this attitude is in the church. Think about the typical evangelical church like ours. We kind of look the other way when young people are having sex outside of marriage. We are willing to not address unmarried people living together outside of marriage. We go all out to bring people to forgive adulterers. But if a person declared himself to be homosexual, most evangelical churches would shun him. I'm hoping that after today's message, we will leave here understanding that any sort of sexual immorality is the same as worshiping a false god. And if we worship false gods, then we are capable of any heinous sin.

I know the evangelical church is confused about sexuality and I know the reason. The reason is that we all listen to what our culture believes, teaches, and advertises about sex. We have let society tell us what is right and wrong. Let this be a day in which we make a clear choice as to what God we worship and what God we will serve.

There is a lot of confusion about sexual purity in church because we don't talk about it enough. Let me give you an example. I was at a church picnic and overheard a little boy ask his mother where he had come from. His mother gave him the typical tale about a beautiful white-feathered bird. The boy ran over to his grandmother and asked where his mother had come from. The grandmother gave him a similar story about the stork's delivery. All at once he bolted back to his friends. I heard him say, "You know, there hasn't been a normal birth in our family for three generations.

I think that we will see God get very specific about what He expects of His children. He gets specific so no one could say they didn't understand.

I know that we are incredibly confused about sexuality in the church community. But God is not confused and He has not left mixed messages. Perhaps what adds to the confusion is that we are not willing to own up to past sins or past destructive behavior. Or even if we are, we are not willing to acknowledge that we have destroyed people's lives. Since God is so clear on what He expects of us sexually, we'd better carefully examine ourselves. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **SINCE WE LIVE IN SUCH A SEXUALLY PERVERTED CULTURE; WE LIVE IN AN IDOLATROUS CULTURE. WE MUST CONSTANTLY CHECK OURSELVES TO MAKE SURE WE ARE NOT AS PERVERTED AND IDOLATROUS.**

We often read and quote this passage from Isaiah when the prophet saw God and was commissioned as a prophet:

"5"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5 / NIV).

As long as Isaiah just lived among the people of his day, and as long as he compared himself to them, he thought he was doing pretty well. But when he found himself in the presence of God, he realized how much he had been tainted by the culture in which he lived.

If we want to have any chance of being sexually pure, we must bring our thoughts, attitudes, words, and behaviors into the presence of God.

I. A GOOD TEST OF SALVATION (VS 1-5) ***We Are To Resist Being Squeezed into the World's Mold.***

In verses 1-5 we can see that our views about sex and our sexual conduct become a good test of our salvation. Becoming a Christian throws us immediately into a holy war for our souls. The questions that resolve it at every moment is this, "Who do I serve and acknowledge as Lord: The God of the Bible or the World that is dominated by Satan?" It's really not complicated at all. When I act out sexually in any way, I am publicly declaring to the world that Satan is my Lord. I know that we are bombarded with sexual messages but the point is this. **WE ARE TO RESIST BEING SQUEEZED INTO THE WORLD'S MOLD.**

Satan wants us to separate out sexual immorality from evaluating a person's life. For example, our movies often portray our greatest heroes as sexually immoral. We give awards to people and we admire great people and overlook their immorality. In fact, we are kind of duped into liking these people, elevating them in our minds to heroes of society, while at the same time overlooking their sexual immorality. There is no way in God's standards of measure this can be. A person cannot be a sexual pig and a nice person at the same time. In the world that may be true, but certainly not in God's community. Let me straighten a lot of bologna I hear Christians quote in defense of sexually immoral people. They say, "David was a man after God's own heart. He committed adultery and even murdered the woman's husband." Oh that's true. But listen what God tells David through the prophet Nathan:

"9Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

¹¹"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. ¹²You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel'" (II Samuel 12:9-12 / NIV).

I don't think one can really read the Scripture and try to make stupid statements about God accepting sexual immorality in any way or forgiving it without severe consequences. The upshot

of that is that most of us raised in the United States are living with the horrible consequences of sexual immorality.

A. COMMANDS FOR GOD'S CHILDREN (2, 4, 5)

It is very clear in verses 2, 4, and 5 that these commands are for God's children. I know that it is fashionable to just dismiss these sorts of passages by saying that they only apply to the Israelites of Moses' day. It is good biblical exegesis to inquire as to whom commands and promises are given. I think that is important but I don't think we can dismiss these passages that easily. There are eternal principles here. God commanded Moses to speak to the Israelites. These people were called out of Egypt and gathered together around God in the wilderness. Literally God had gathered them together around Himself. God set up His tent in the middle of the Hebrew camp with three tribes camping on each side.

The word *synagogue* in Greek means *gathered together*. The word for *church* in Greek means to be *called out*. God has called Christians out of the world. He has gathered us together around the headship of Jesus Christ. We are God's chosen people. He lives in our midst. He is no less holy now than He was then. He is no farther away today than He was then. There are different ways to apply truths throughout the ages but the truth remains the same. Some commands that pertain to Israel's judicial system cannot be carried out today. Even though some Christians still eat kosher, Jesus declared all foods clean. But as far as I am aware, Jesus never declared all sexual behavior to be clean. I think Jesus took the sexual standards to a higher level. Under the Lordship of Jesus, even our thoughts must be pure. These commands apply to us.

B. COMMANDS FROM GOD (1, 4, 5)

Verses 1, 4, and 5, make it clear that these are commands from God. First of all, these are not suggestions or guidelines. They are not open to interpretation or reinterpretation to fit our lifestyles. In verse 4 God says, "You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees." In verse 5 He says, "Keep my decrees and laws." There is no debate.

I further think that with all the possible scenarios He gives, His intent is to demonstrate there is to be no doubt as to what He wants. I guess I shouldn't be surprised to see how modern young people try to reinterpret Christianity and sex so as to fit their behavior. Young people who were going into the ministry asked me if it was a sin that they would lie down together naked and manually bring one another to orgasm. "After all," they said, "we're not having sex." Other couples were bringing one another to orgasm by having oral sex. They too told me, "After all, we're not having sex."

I'm thinking that perhaps that is why the book of Leviticus was the first book of the Bible Jewish parents taught their children. When we have already studied that any sort of ejaculation rendered a man unclean and anyone coming in contact with the semen was also unclean, in view of the rest of Leviticus and the Bible, how could anyone be confused as to what sexual immorality is?

Secondly if you just look quickly at these first 5 verses, the phrase "I am the LORD your God" jumps out at you. Why are we to obey these commands? Why are we to be sexually pure and totally different from the culture we live in? Why are we to reject the world? Because Jehovah, the God and Father of Jesus Christ has commanded it. We were paid for by the blood of Jesus. We are God's children. We worship Him alone.

C. COMMANDS FROM THE WORLD (3)

As God nicely pointed out in verse 3, we will hear the commands of the world coming at us loud and clear. They were commanded not to imitate the sexual immorality or idolatry of either Egypt from where they came nor of the Canaanites where they were headed. A lot of the practices that will be described in the rest of this chapter were practiced by these two very dominant and

powerful cultures. The Egyptians were known for incestuous relationships, especially among the royal families. The Canaanites were known for their sexual immorality and their linking it to religion and worship.

For us, the application is very simple to arrive at. We live in a culture that is sexually immoral. With the sexual revolution came abortion. Being sexually immoral in our society is not only not looked down upon, it is encouraged by schools, society, friends, and even family. In fact, being sexually active and desirable is considered a status to be sought after. The more sexually active the more desirable people become in our society. We have become a culture of sexual immorality, idolatry, and murder. I have got to tell you, I understand how society got this way, but I can't even begin to understand how this filth has infected the church. The point is this. **WE ARE TO RESIST BEING SQUEEZED INTO THE WORLD'S MOLD.**

Let me just make an aside comment here. I hang around with guys who would never get involved in sexual immorality. And that being the case, we often joke about culture and we joke about their immoral behavior. After studying through Leviticus and our small group study through The Pursuit of Holiness, I am not even going to joke about this stuff. I wouldn't joke about murder or abuse of any kind. I told my friends I would not be joking about this any more. They have agreed to hold me accountable. I don't think I have made many jokes or comments since.

II. SEX AND IDOLATRY (VS 6-23)

The Bible Almost Always Connects Perverted Sex With Worshiping Idols.

The stakes are high because as verses 6-23 illustrate, sex and idolatry go hand in hand. **THE BIBLE ALMOST ALWAYS CONNECTS PERVERTED SEX WITH WORSHIPING IDOLS.** Did you ever think about this? Any type of acting out sexually is the same as worshiping a false god. When Israel worships false gods, God equates that as adultery. When Israel acts out sexually God equates that with idolatry.

A. PERVERTED SEX BRINGS CHAOS TO THE COMMUNITY (6-17)

First of all, it is pretty easy to see that perverted sex brings chaos to the community as described in verses 6-17. Perverted sex is defined as any sex outside of marriage and in some instances perverted sex can take place in the context of marriage as well. Let me just make an aside comment here. I hear young people and older people in some cases say there is nothing wrong with premarital sex. Let me give you some anecdotal evidence and some statistical evidence to the contrary. In all the years I have done premarital counseling and weddings, I can say that in the weddings I performed that ended in divorce, without exception the couple had been involved sexually and in some cases even living together before they got married. To me, that's a pretty powerful statistic. For the one's who were involved in premarital sex and still married, please take that statistic to heart and be extra careful in guarding the sanctity of your marriage. Those are hard statistics.

Anecdotally, this state of affairs always accompanies people who are involved sexually. The first assumption is this. If the person you are having sex with is having sex with you, you can be sure that he or she would have sex with others as well. When people break up who have not had sex, the breakup is painful, but not nearly as painful and hurtful as those who had been involved sexually. You can deny the evidence all you want, but I can tell you I have seen this over and over again throughout the years.

Let me make one more point. I said that sexual immorality is equal to worshiping idols. Look at verse 6. This verse marks off this next section. First of all note the phrase again, "I am Jehovah." If we read this verse quickly, it just seems as if God is going to lay down laws that cover sexual behavior. But follow this because we have studied this before in the very beginning of Leviticus. When describing the different types of sacrifices, the word used in general was

offerings. We said that word was *qorban*. It means to draw near or to present. In other words, the worshiper was bringing himself or herself near to God.

They were presenting themselves to God in addition to bringing their particular sacrifice as a worship offering to God. Now back to verse 6. The NIV says, "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations." That phrase to approach is the same root word as the word for offering in the worship context. The word here is *qarab*. Please don't miss the force of this. In worshiping God, we present ourselves in holiness to Him. In sexual immorality, we are presenting ourselves for defiling ourselves. In other words in true worship we present ourselves to God. In being sexually immoral, we are presenting ourselves to the god of this world who is Satan.

I hope you don't miss this. If I ask most Christians if they would ever consider worshiping the devil, they would become indignant with me and ask if I was crazy. And yet, if I told them that fooling around sexually was the same as worshiping the devil, they wouldn't believe me. But it's true.

I don't think we have any trouble understanding the obvious harm of having sex with one's mother, father, stepmother, stepfather, sister, brother, step-sister, step-brother, granddaughter, grandson, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, or any combination of daughter, mother, grandmother, or son, father, grandfather. Notice that if you read these commands, they are all from the male's point of view. But if you think, if the male is having one of these illicit sexual relations, it is with a female, so the same commands apply to females as well.

Notice that the word dishonor is used throughout this passage. For the most part, in our culture, other than the people appearing on the Jerry Springer Show here in Chicago, we don't have much problem with these regulations. But the point is this. These were common practices among the people in whose countries the Hebrews lived and were about to inhabit. So without these commands, the Hebrews could think these sexual relationships were normal.

But back to that word *dishonor*. The Hebrews were living in the wilderness in very close quarters. To have illicit sex with a woman, you must hurt another person: her husband, her father, her mother, and her brothers. The same goes for women. When you are about to have sex outside of marriage, remember that person you are about to have sex with is someone's daughter, son, husband or wife. And by having sex with that person illicitly, you are dishonoring someone in their life. And when you are about to have sex with someone outside of marriage, you are dishonoring the people in your life: your mother, father, sister, brother, future husband or wife. But most of all remember this if you are a Christian. We belong to Jesus Christ. He purchased us with His blood. When we have sex outside of marriage, we dishonor Him most of all.

We all know what it means to be betrayed by a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife. Can you imagine what hard feelings would be going around the camp if people were all upset with each other for having sex with their husbands or wives? I don't think I need to prove that any further.

I was one of the men who had high hopes for the women's rights movement. I thought at last we would see equality and harmony between men and women. I thought women would raise men to their level because in general, throughout history, women had tended to be more religious and acted much better. However, what a disappointment to see that what actually happened was that women lowered themselves to being as degraded and perverted as men.

B. WOMEN BECOME THE VICTIMS OF PERVERTED SEX (18-20)

The sick irony in all of this is that when societies become sexually perverted, women become the victims of perverted sex as described in verses 18-20. In this section, the Hebrew language is very graphic. It talks about men depositing the seed, referring to their ejaculation. In other words, these references are to a man depositing his semen at the wrong time, in the wrong place, with wrong motive. The first example is taking a woman and having sex with her out of a

wrong motive. In this instance, the husband would have two sisters competing for his sperm and for his affection. That is totally self-centered. Even though that was not Jacob's motive, his life became a living hell being married to sisters. They competed for his sperm, his attention, and his inheritance. There was never a moment's peace in his household. Think about how many men are having sex with more than one woman at a time.

I don't know about you, but I could never trust a man or a woman who was having sex with different partners while his or her partner was not aware of it. A man or woman, who would cheat on his or her partner, has no credibility in my world. And if you even carry it one step further into the absurd, when a woman finds out her man was having sex with another woman, she gets mad at the other woman. The other woman gets mad at her. The guy who was two timing is the pig. The same for a woman who is having sex with two guys and her boyfriend finds out. The boyfriend wants to fight the other guy. It is the woman is the pig.

The second instance describes a man having sex with a woman during her menstrual cycle. This just shows a total disrespect for the woman. It amounts to rape. The Hebrew woman was in a state of ceremonial uncleanness. Anything or anyone she touched also became unclean. It was a time for her to be left alone at peace. It was kind of a Sabbath for her. A man who would violate that demonstrates a total lack of self-control and respect for the woman. Do I really need to convince you that the popular culture we live in has no respect for women? Society has turned women into sexual objects and instead of rebelling against this, women now turn themselves into sexual objects. Look at the way women dress, look at music videos, look at video games, look at television. Women have become complicit in turning themselves into sexual objects. We are a perverted society.

C. THE FOLLY OF PERVERTED SEX (21-23)

Verses 21-23 lay out the folly of perverted sex. If you don't understand how the Bible connects sexual immorality with idolatry, you may think that verse 21 is out of place. But in reality, it is exactly where it belongs. Now God lays out for them what sexual immorality leads to. The picture here is of the Moabites who offered their children in sacrifice to the god Molech. Some descriptions of the ceremony depict a metal statue of Molech with his arms stretched out. The statue was surrounded by flames and heated up until the arms became red with heat. At this point parents would take their live babies and place them in the fiery arms of the statue. The babies would be scalded and burned alive.

Remember in the last couple of verses, the Hebrew phrase had to do with placing one's seed in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with wrong motive. Here that word seed is used again. Only this time instead of referring to sperm, it referred to the offspring of their seed. Now they are again worshiping a false god with their seed.

Look where the sexual revolution has brought us. We have turned women into sexual objects. Women have turned themselves into sexual objects and have also turned men into sexual objects. How far have we deteriorated? Since 1973, we have killed over one million babies a year through abortion. That means over the past 34 years, our society has killed over 34 million babies. We have passed 34 million children through the fires of Molech. Here is the message for us. If a man and a woman can kill their unborn baby, what crime or sin won't we commit? What could possibly be more horrific or anti-Christ? What could be more demonic? What could be any closer to devil worship?

I don't want what follows here to be construed as justification for homophobic behavior or a reason to do violence to homosexuals. But God says here that it will be a natural outcome of sexually immoral and perverted societies to embrace homosexual behavior. And to carry it a step further, men and women would have sex with animals as well. We all gasp when we think about a man or woman having sex with an animal.

Since we live in Chicago, let's pretend we are attending a taping of the Jerry Springer show. Up on the stage are people who are admitting to having sex with their daughter-in-laws, people

proud of having sex with their sisters, fathers justifying having sex with their daughters, and people who are talking about the beauty of having sex with animals.

The audience starts yelling their disapproval out, "Jerry, Jerry, Jerry." Several audience members angrily chastise the people on the stage and give them a moral tongue lashing. And we would be saying, "Amen. You tell them sister."

But then all of sudden we realize that the woman who just chastised these people had just bared her own breasts a minute ago. Another man who chastised the people on the stage said that he didn't need to have sex with an animal because his girlfriend, who he was living with, met all his sexual needs. What occurs to us is this. If we were evaluating this whole process, the guy having sex with his girlfriend was just as perverted as the man having sex with his daughter-in-law. The girl flaunting her breasts was just as perverted as the woman on stage who said she enjoyed having sex with a dog.

Here is the folly. We live in a totally perverted society who claims to make distinctions between right and wrong and sounds very morally charged. But in reality, we live in the midst of a bunch of pigs. But the sad thing is that we as the church have lost our moral compass as well. We have bought into the lies of our culture. I would say that most of us who were raised in the United States in the 40's, 50's, 60's, and 70's are definitely tainted by sexual immorality, and all the other sins that go with it. We have worshiped at the altar of Satan. Many of us have killed our own babies. What evil is there left for us to commit? What won't we do?

Look, not many of us have escaped being sexually immoral. But there has to be a total commitment to rejecting all forms in our lives. We have to confess that we have worshiped the devil but we won't do it again. Even we Christians have to echo the sentiment of the Prophet Isaiah. We are tainted people living in the midst of immorality. But there is a lot a stake here. **THE BIBLE ALMOST ALWAYS CONNECTS PERVERTED SEX WITH WORSHIPING IDOLS.**

III. GOD'S PROMISES (VS 24-30)

God Will Surely Punish Sexual Immorality And Idolatry.

What makes the stakes so high is described in verses 24-30. What God promises, He will do. This is certain. **GOD WILL SURELY PUNISH SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND IDOLATRY.**

A. CHECK HISTORY (24-25)

The best way to project how a person will react is to see how they have reacted in the past. God makes it easy for us to check out His history in verses 24-25. God says that when a culture acts out in sexually perverted ways, He will cause the land itself to become nauseous and vomit them out. About 500 years before speaking to the Israelites about entering the land He was about to give them, listen to what God promised Abraham about this very land:

"¹⁶In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Genesis 15:16 / NIV).

God was telling Abraham that when the cup of immorality became full, God would judge them and kick them out of the land. The time has come. Now the Hebrews were about to inherit this promise. These commands given by God came with a visual aide. They would see first hand what would happen to people who polluted the land with sexual immorality and idolatry. Further, they had seen first hand what God did to Egypt for their sexual immorality and idolatry.

B. BETTER CHECK OURSELVES (26-28)

If that's the case, then verses 26-28 point out that it would be a good idea for us to check ourselves out. God again warned the Hebrews that when they entered the land, they better be careful to obey all that He commanded them. Not only that but if foreigners wanted to settle in

their land, they too must abide by these commands. Otherwise, God would judge them and kick them out of the land as well.

I don't think I'm making any great prophecy here when I say that the United States has about run its course. We live in a sexually perverted, violent society that has no interest in really serving the God of the Bible. We are so perverted and immoral that if I read the Bible correctly, I don't think God will tolerate us all that much longer. Great patriotic people will challenge me and ask which country is better to judge us. And that's just the point. God often used pagan nations to come in and wipe His people out in judgment.

C. GOD WILL CHECK US OUT (29-30)

In my opinion, the only thing that can possibly save the United States is if the church stops worrying about politics and starts living the gospel. Verses 29-30 remind us that God will check us out. If we believers start living pure, upright, and holy lives, God may spare the benefit of true believers. The problem is that not many people who claim to be Christians are actually Christians.

We must be sexually pure and committed to following Jesus Christ in holiness. God told Abraham He would spare Sodom and Gomorrah if there were 10 righteous people living in the city. The sad thing is there weren't even 10 righteous people in the whole city. I'm hoping that there are a few people who call themselves Christians that are authentic and committed to sexual purity. Like it or not, the Bible makes sexual thought and conduct a critical measure determining the authenticity of one's belief in Christ. This is certain. **GOD WILL SURELY PUNISH SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND IDOLATRY.**

IV. EPILOGUE

We are bombarded constantly with sexually perverted messages. We are constantly tempted to worship the god of this world. And the world is constantly trying to seduce us. As far as I can tell, Satan has done a fantastic job. We Christians must take this seriously and put up a good fight. **SINCE WE LIVE IN SUCH A SEXUALLY PERVERTED CULTURE; WE LIVE IN AN IDOLATROUS CULTURE. WE MUST CONSTANTLY CHECK OURSELVES TO MAKE SURE WE ARE NOT AS PERVERTED AND IDOLATROUS.**

Listen to what the theologian Frederick Buechner said about what we have done with sex.

"Once they had sinned, Adam and Eve tried to hide their nakedness from each other and from God, and to one degree or another we have all been hiding it ever since for the reason, I suppose, that we know that our sexuality is yet another good gift from God which as sinners we can nonetheless use to dehumanize both each other and ourselves."

To me, that about sums it up. But we must remember that our commitment to remaining sexually pure in thought and action is really a good test as to whether or not we are truly saved.