

MAY 2012

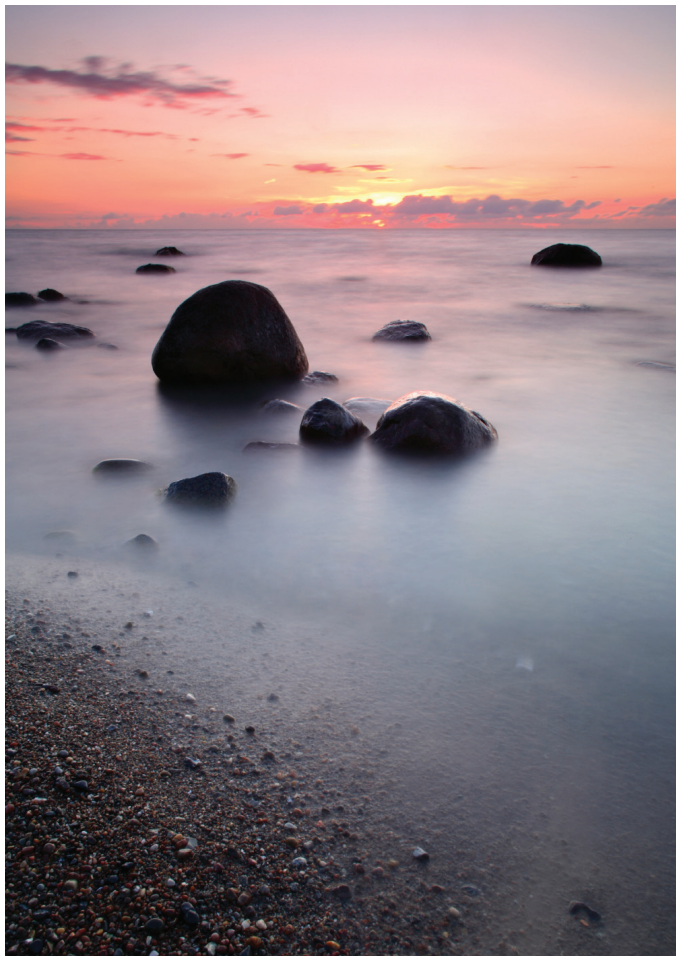
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

Be holy
because I,
the LORD
your God,
am holy.

Leviticus 19:2



Leviticus:
Holiness for God's People Today



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TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

The Final Sacrifice



My family moved off the farm when I was young, but I remember hearing about the daily regimen of chores. One of the tasks a dairy farmer has to complete every day is

the milking of the cows. Cows don't take a sick day or a vacation day. They need to be milked every day. It's a task you can never escape.

There was a similar daily chore that the nation of Israel faced. It didn't have to do with the milking of cows; it had to do with the sacrificing of lambs. The Law prescribed that Israel had to offer the blood of an unblemished lamb on the altar to atone for sin. This chore was to be repeated day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. This was God's prescribed means of dealing with sin.

Leviticus 4 outlines the procedures for these sin offerings. The average Israelite would have been well acquainted with these instructions. They sinned, and they knew they required a sacrifice.

But there were three main problems with this sacrificial system. First, it was continual, not final. It was just like those cows that needed to be milked every morning. You couldn't get away from it. There was never a final sacrifice.

Second, the sacrificial system could not change the inclination of the heart toward sin. The sacrifices could not bring full reunion between God and His people. The barrier of the veil before God's presence in the Most Holy Place kept out the people. Third, the sacrificial system brought a constant reminder of sin, but not remission of sin.

God sent His Son Jesus to earth to provide full atonement, making it possible for people to be in complete fellowship with God. He offered His own blood, presenting His perfect, sinless life before God to atone for sin. The incredible significance of Jesus' coming to earth is perhaps best summed up by the words of John the Baptist, when he first laid eyes on Christ. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

By calling Christ the "Lamb of God," John the Baptist specified that this would indeed be the final sacrifice. And then Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, who would fulfill the promises of Jeremiah 31 and ensure that God's people have a new heart. Now it is possible to have our inclination toward sin changed through the work of the Spirit, enabling us to live in a way that pleases God.

Christ came to earth to take away both the penalty for sin and the practice of sin, so that we can have a relationship with Him and become like Him. May we never take for granted Christ's willingness to become man to take away our sins (1 John 3:5).

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



Priesthood of the Believer

The book of Leviticus was a priestly manual. According to Old Testament scholar J. Barton Payne, it served a specific purpose: “God revealed the priestly codes to Moses in 1445 B.C. at Sinai, immediately after the construction of the Tabernacle. The purpose of these was to provide professional guidance for the priests and a detailed liturgy for the house of God.” The laws found in the book of Leviticus differ from those found in Deuteronomy primarily in their scope. The laws of Deuteronomy were more comprehensive, intended to guide God’s people in their new life in Canaan. The laws of Leviticus were more technical and related to the priestly rituals associated with Israel’s worship.

When Christ came, however, an important theological shift occurred. These Old Testament laws, which figured so importantly in the daily life and worship of God’s people, had fulfilled their purpose and were replaced by a new order. The sacrifices demanded by the Law of Moses ceased to be necessary, since Christ’s sacrifice of Himself accomplished what the Levitical sacrifices could not (Heb. 10:1). The Levitical priesthood became obsolete, surpassed and replaced by the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:11–14). In the current church age every believer is a priest and has direct access to the Father’s presence.

The blood of Christ gives us the confidence to approach God directly without the help of an earthly mediator (Heb. 10:19–22). This access gives every believer the status of priest. We offer our worship to God as we “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). We present our bodies (i.e., our lives) to God as a living sacrifice and an act of true worship (Rom. 12:1).

We should not conclude from the Bible’s doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that the church has no need of designated leaders. In his first epistle Peter describes all believers as priests, but also describes the responsibilities of the church’s elders. They serve as the church’s shepherds (1 Peter 5:1–2).

Nor should we conclude that believers no longer need a High Priest. The writer of Hebrews assures us that Jesus Christ continues to serve as our heavenly High Priest. Because He was made like us, Jesus is able to be merciful. Because He was sinless, He is able to be faithful (Heb. 2:15). Because He was tempted like us in every way, He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). Because He was victorious over temptation, sin, and death, He is able to offer redemption. Jesus always lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25).

For Further Reading

To learn more about how Jesus is reflected in Leviticus, read *Leviticus* by Andrew Bonar (Banner of Truth).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Heather Moffitt

Finding Joy in Complex Truth

This month we are introducing a new writer to our team of Q&A columnists. Dr. David Rim has taught at Moody Bible Institute for thirteen years, and we are delighted that he will be sharing his insights in theology and biblical understanding with our readers on a regular basis.

Dr. Rim teaches courses in philosophy, apologetics, and philosophical theology. If that sounds like intense, challenging material—it is! At the age of 16, Rim came to faith in Christ at a youth retreat. As he grew as a Christian, he encountered issues in theology and apologetics that fascinated him in their complexity. The more research he did, the more he felt the desire to teach in these areas. “By God’s grace, I have this opportunity at Moody to do what I love to do!” he said.

Rim also appreciates getting to know the students. Everything at Moody is focused on preparing students to serve the Lord in the ministries to which they’ve been called, whether it’s teaching a course in philosophy or worshiping in chapel or supervising a field education placement. “I most enjoy watching students grow during their time here,” Rim said. “Even better than that is to hear back from them after they’ve left Moody and to see where God is taking them.”

Rim grew up in Baltimore, Maryland. He met his wife Maria through a blind date—set up by his mother! “Never discount your mom’s advice in the dating process!” he declared. The blind date led to marriage and then twin daughters, Rachel and Katie.

Rim loves to spend time with his family, including watching movie adaptations of Jane Austen novels.

For some philosophy and apologetics professors, their work is merely an academic exercise. The mental challenge of working through questions about the existence of God or the presence of evil in the world is the goal. Studying and research and teaching is about demonstrating winning arguments or even showing off intelligence. For Rim, however, his work as a professor is intimately connected with his service to the people of God. He is the teaching pastor at a second-generation Korean church, and his pastoral service and academic work influence each other. “My teaching informs my preaching, while my preaching keeps my teaching more relevant and devotional,” he noted. Rim knows that his students need to be trained in theology and apologetics to be prepared for their future ministries. They will be in real-life situations with real questions from real people.

Today in the Word is also a ministry to real people in real-life situations. One reason the Q&A column began 25 years ago was in recognition that you, our readers, have questions about biblical and theological perspectives on issues that you face every day. We are thankful to have Dr. David Rim extend his ministry at Moody Bible Institute to include the readers of *Today in the Word*, sharing his theological insights and applying the truth of God’s Word to the questions of life.

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TODAY IN THE **Word**

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Leviticus: Holiness for God's People Today

Rules and regulations—we can look at them as restrictions that prevent us from doing what we want, or we can see them as guidelines that show the world who we are. Leviticus, when we look at it from a biblical, God-centered perspective, is Israel's blueprint for building a lifestyle of holiness.

God's people are holy because God set them apart. But we show we are holy by exemplifying God's rules. The pages of Leviticus reveal lessons of God's sense of holiness, the power of purification, and the celebration of God's redemptive work of salvation from the judgment of our sins.

This month in *Today in the Word* we'll examine the lessons of Leviticus to show how they teach us of God's character, His holiness, and His plan for us. We will see how the observations of the Law set Israel apart as uniquely God's and taught them to honor all that was uniquely His.

The Law of God is anything but outdated. We pray as you join with us in studying this rich and challenging book of Scripture that you would see the signs that point to Jesus, and that the timeless truth would make a difference in how you live for God today.

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Understanding Leviticus as Part of the Pentateuch

In an essay, C. S. Lewis described how he conceived *The Chronicles of Narnia*: “The Lion all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood . . . [when] I was about sixteen. Then one day, when I was about forty, I said to myself: ‘Let’s try to make a story about it.’”

What all goes into writing of a good book? How does an author go about gathering his material? Even with Scripture, we might wonder how much each author allowed their own intentions to shape the books they wrote. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit, but they still brought their unique perspectives to the writing task.

Moses is generally credited with authorship of the first five books of the Bible. These five books, or the Pentateuch, were originally composed as a single book and separated at a much later date. This probably reflected the

practice of dividing long books into separate scrolls for the sake of ease. Moses wrote at the time when the nation was poised to enter the Promised Land. This book (or five books) was meant to shape their understanding of God and their identity as His people. There was no more critical time for transferring the important stories of the past for future generations.

Leviticus, whose name means, “pertaining to the Levitical priests,” is a book divided into two parts: the Priestly Code (chapters 1–16) and the Holiness Code (chapters 17–27). It describes the regulations for sacrificial worship, which was instituted within a year of the Exodus, just after the completion of the construction of the tabernacle.

As we will see this month, this is not an outdated, irrelevant book. Leviticus is a book rich with symbolism and threaded with theology.

For the Word
of God is alive
and active.

Hebrews 4:12

Apply the Word

Leviticus is not a book we often hear taught or preached. We might avoid it for fear of its hard-to-understand passages. What can help us at the beginning of our study is to remember that all Scripture is given to teach and transform us. Pray for God to move you beyond your reluctance of studying Leviticus and into a wide-eyed curiosity and eagerness.

Pray with Us

Please join us in praying for Steven Mogck, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer. May the Lord guide him and give him wisdom as he oversees day-to-day business operations at Moody.

The Language of Sin and Holiness in Leviticus

Author and journalist A. J. Jacobs, who describes himself as a nominal Jew, devoted an entire year to obeying every one of the 613 Old Testament laws. His book, *The Year of Living Biblically*, describes his quest to “follow the Bible as literally as possible . . . without picking and choosing.”

Leviticus 19 gives us a glimpse at the challenge that A. J. Jacobs faced and the questions he must have asked along the way. Some of the Levitical commands seem logical, such as the ones governing sexual practice and condemning idol worship. Other commands, like those that forbid a field be sown with two kinds of seed or those that insist on certain hairstyles, seem utterly strange. What could God have meant in all this seemingly haphazard, “Thou shall,” and “Thou shall not”?

We turn to Leviticus 19 to introduce us, not only to the complexities of studying

this book but also to its evident themes. Some things are clear. First, the book of Leviticus is a book where God, as the holy authority over His people, is at the center. The phrase, “And the Lord said to Moses,” becomes its familiar refrain. These words spoken are God’s words.

These commands are God’s. The authority is His and His alone, and His authority is grounded in His work of redemptive love and rescue.

Clear categories that emerge in the book of Leviticus: the clean and

the unclean, the holy and the profane. In essence, as much as the holiness of God takes center stage in Leviticus, alongside it is the chronic reminder of humanity’s sin. What Leviticus does is to provide prescriptions, given by God, for bridging the divide and bringing sinful men and women near to Him. Leviticus is not only law but grace—an expression of the gracious inclination of God to provide a means for atonement.

Be holy because
I, the LORD your
God, am holy.

Leviticus 19:2

Apply the Word

Jacobs makes no claims to be a “believer” after his year’s experiment. But he must have discovered the sheer impossibility of keeping even one of God’s commands. In the book of James, we’re reminded, “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (2:10). What desperate need we have for a Savior!

Pray with Us

Today, will you remember in your prayers the employees serving in Facilities Maintenance: John Addison, Thomas Addison, Edgardo Bartolome, and Troy Billow? These men help maintain our Chicago campus for staff, students, and visitors.

Creation: God’s Good Work of Beginnings

Annie Dillard muses about the mysteries of creation in her book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*: “The creator goes off on one wild, specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an abandoned energy sprung from an unfathomable font. What is going on here?”

It seems an appropriate question when we stare at the intricate complexity of creation. Genesis 1 serves as an introduction to the entire Pentateuch, laying fundamental ground work for our theology. Later, in Leviticus, Moses reprises some themes found here.

God is the invisible, sovereign ruler of the entire universe. Because He is the creator of all, He rules over all. The scope of detail in the creation account is limited to the land, animals, and humanity. There is no mention of other planets or distant galaxies. The land

and the people are the central concerns, which we’ll see again in Leviticus.

While He transcends His creation in His immortality and supreme authority, God is also peculiarly interested and invested in one of His creations: humanity. He makes humanity to reflect unique aspects of His being, giving them governance over creation and special blessing. He wills them His land; He makes them for relationship with Himself and with each other.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

Genesis 1 sings with the melodies of the goodness and order and beauty of the land and the life that inhabits it. It is life as God intends. We know, however, it’s only two short chapters later that a terrible unraveling begins to take place. Sin mars what was originally good. Leviticus arrives at the part of the story that is the wreckage, brooding on these darker themes of disorder, disease, and death.

Apply the Word

One theologian has described the Pentateuch as “eschatological.” That’s a fancy theological word for saying that the Pentateuch looks ahead; its perspective is future-oriented. We start to see why: something has gone wrong. The gospel is the good news that God, through Jesus, is redeeming the universe and reordering creation according to its original design.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Facilities Maintenance, please lift up Vincent Camera, Andrew Franklin, Matthew Morris, and Paul Heggeland. Thank the Lord for their willingness to use their talents to serve Him at Moody.

Covenant: God’s Good Work of Rescue

Charles Haddon Spurgeon ended his sermon on January 24, 1861, with these words: “An unholy Church! It is of no use to the world, and of no esteem among men. Oh, it is an abomination, hell’s laughter, heaven’s abhorrence. And the larger the Church, the more influential, the worst nuisance does it become, when it becomes dead and unholy.”

Exodus 19 sets the stage for Israel’s reckoning with this holy God. It had been three months since the nation left Egypt where they had witnessed God’s

great acts of deliverance: spectacular plagues and rescues. Questions must still have lingered: who was this God of Abraham? What did it mean that they were now to be His people?

In Exodus 19, God declares the terms of His covenant. At the foot of Mount Sinai, as the lightning flashes and the thunder echoes, the people witnessed God’s terrifying holiness. There will be no casual

trifling with this God; there are ritual purifications they must undergo in order to meet with Him. These signify His perfection and their impurity: His holiness and their unholiness.

A mediator was required for the confirmation of the covenant. Moses stands in for the people, speaking to God face-to-face, and mediating the terms. He relayed messages from God to the people. He alone draws near to God; the rest of the nation stood at a distance in fear.

You will be for me
a kingdom
of priests and a
holy nation.

Exodus 19:6

Exodus 19 inaugurates a kingdom of priests, but Leviticus, as we’ll soon see, codifies a kingdom with priests. The Sinai covenant, as the Pentateuch makes clear, will not be sufficient to put right what went wrong in the Garden. The Pentateuch is pointing us forward many, many centuries: to a better covenant, to a faithful High Priest, and to a final Mediator. His name is Jesus Christ.

Apply the Word

We learn to treasure God’s grace in direct proportion to how we measure our unworthiness. Leviticus is important for leading us deeper into understanding of our sin and our need for a Savior. Brennan Manning wrote, “All that is good is ours, not by right, but by the sheer bounty of a gracious God. . . . Even our fidelity is a gift.”

Pray with Us

Jim Elliott, Vice President of Stewardship, requests your prayers for Moody’s fundraising efforts. Ask God to move in the hearts of His people to support the work He’s doing through Moody’s education and media ministries.

Worship and the Requirement of Atonement

Some of America's biggest mega-churches have rejected traditional formalities. Contemporary worship bands replaced robed choirs. Pastors deliver sermons in jeans and wrinkled shirts. Pews, and sometimes even crosses, have disappeared from church buildings. That may be why the detailed prescriptions for worship in Leviticus seem odd to many of us. We have a tough time making sense of all the ceremony. What's more, the blood sacrifice system offends our sensibilities. There's a definite gruesomeness.

First, we need to re-orient ourselves to the historical context of Leviticus. The Israelites left Egypt less than 14 months earlier. They had the stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; and while the practice of sacrifices and burnt offerings is not itself new, there's still so much they don't yet understand about their corporate identity and about God Himself.

Lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.

Leviticus 1:4

They needed to absorb the realities of God's holiness and how they, as His people, would be required to revere and reflect that holiness. The prescriptions and prohibitions regarding the sacrifices were signs and symbols of God's perfection and of their sin. There were right and wrong ways to approach this God. Worship required obedience and acceptable practices.

The first seven chapters of Leviticus deal with the various sacrifices the people could bring to God. The burnt offering, as described here in chapter 1, is one of the sacrifices for securing atonement. Atonement is a critical term for understanding Leviticus. A reconciled relationship with God is possible only when sin is dealt with. Because sin incurs the penalty of death, either we will die for our own sin or a substitute will be required to which we transfer our guilt.

Apply the Word

Leviticus looks forward to the final atonement sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the sacrificial system was always an imperfect one. It had been intended as a way of pointing forward to Jesus. Do you doubt sometimes that God forgives your sin? Believe not in the power of your confession but in the effectiveness of His blood!

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody's fundraising efforts, please pray for Moody's Planned Giving team—Eric Beckman, Crystal Davis-Landrum, Emily Ferguson, Mary Lou Fritz, and Stephen Kott—as they assist donors with deferred giving options.

Worship and the Expression of Thanksgiving

Ann Voskamp, a farmer's wife and mother of six, wrote the bestselling book, *One Thousand Gifts*, where she chronicles how keeping a gratitude journal and counting God's blessings transformed her. "Thanksgiving is inherent to a true salvation experience; thanksgiving is necessary to live the well, whole, fullest life."

The offerings described in today's reading are voluntary offerings of thanksgiving. Unlike the burnt offering, the grain and fellowship offerings are not made to secure atonement. But the worshiper still bears a solemn consciousness of his sin; the demands for perfect, unblemished offerings remain. For the fellowship offering, the worshiper lays a symbolic hand on the head of the animal before its slaughter, and the animal's blood is thrown against the sides of the altar.

The grain offering is composed of flour, either unprepared or baked in an oven,

griddle, or pan. Because flour is a food staple, even the poor can offer this. In fact, we'll later see that flour can substitute for an animal sacrifice if that's all a poor man can afford. Provision is made for every person—rich and poor alike—to make offerings to God. Prohibitions against mixing yeast and honey with the grain offerings signify purity. That the offerings should be seasoned with salt symbolizes the long-lasting nature of the covenant.

Enter his gates
with thanksgiving
and his courts
with praise.

Psalm 100:4

For the fellowship, or peace offering, an animal is slaughtered. Unlike the burnt offering, it is not entirely burned up at the altar. The best portions—the fat and the important organs—are reserved for the Lord. Prohibitions against eating the fat and blood remind the worshiper that the best portions must be devoted to God, who grants atonement only through blood. The rest is consumed in a meal shared by the worshiper, his family, and the priests.

Apply the Word

The burnt offering provided a way for acknowledging God's holiness and the need for atonement. The grain and fellowship offerings provided a way for acknowledging the goodness of God. Thanksgiving is the way we continue coming to God. Consider reading Ann Voskamp's book and starting your own gratitude journal.

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for Planned Giving, please ask the Father to bless Moody's Field Representatives serving around the country. May they be a spiritual encouragement to the friends of Moody they meet with today.

Worship and the Expression of Guilt

Although federal prosecutors had taped conversations that clearly implicated Rod Blagojevich, former governor of Illinois, in federal crimes, he continued to publicly deny his guilt: “I don’t believe there’s any cloud that hangs over me. I think there’s nothing but sunshine hanging over me.”

Sin has a track record of self-deception. We can be made to feel guilty when we’ve done nothing wrong or believe ourselves innocent when we’re guilty. Feelings are no fail-safe guide for exposing sin; the Bible is our only reliable authority when it comes to probing our inner motivations and arbitrating our actions.

Leviticus offers a thorough look at what is and isn’t sin. In our passage today, we see that sin isn’t only a descriptor for the evil things we’ve done intentionally. Sin can also include unintentional acts. Guilt or innocence is not weighed on the

scales of motivation. To mean to do right while inadvertently doing wrong is still sin. Sin is the transgression, or betrayal, of God’s holy standards, whether we’re conscious of those standards or not.

We betray God’s law not only by doing bad things (sins of commission) but also by neglecting to do good things (sins of omission). In Leviticus 5, we see someone who refused to publicly testify about a situation which he witnessed. He was guilty because of what he failed to do.

The Word of God . . . judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

Because sin wields such power of self-deception, it is our inclination to justify ourselves before God. We make excuses for why our sin isn’t really that bad. But all of our well-reasoned arguments don’t exonerate us. The good news is that God is always providing a means for atonement. It’s His gracious desire to forgive and reconcile people to Himself.

Apply the Word

We need the light of Scripture to shine in our hearts even as we ask, “Search me, God, and know my heart; . . . See if there is any offensive way in me” (Psalm 139:23–24). Make this your prayer every evening when you lie down or every morning when you wake up. Accept any conviction from the Holy Spirit, and then accept His forgiveness when you confess.

Pray with Us

Caring for the telephone connection of about 600 employees serving at Moody is the responsibility of Scott Schaeffer and Daniel Schombert in the Telecommunications department. Please express gratitude to the Lord for their faithful service.

Worship and the Definition of Sin

At the end of the second century, Jewish oral traditions were codified and written down in the Mishnah. Before this time, it was the task of the rabbis to interpret the traditions. As a result, there was a constant dueling over interpretations between rabbis and the schools of thought they represented.

Jesus was often put in the middle of these theological squabbles. One teacher of the law came to Him to ask which of the commandments was most important. Jesus answered that there were two: love God and love your neighbor. These are the totality of what God requires of us.

Notice that according to Jesus, and to our passage today from Leviticus, all sin is offense against God. To be sure, some sins are aimed more explicitly at God, such as the misuse of “the Lord’s holy things” (5:15). This presumably means the sacrifices themselves. Both bringing blemished animals and neglecting

to bring clean animals when they were required were obvious acts of sin for which payment must be made in the form of a guilt offering.

But sin is not merely the overt things we do to defraud God or dishonor Him. It is also sin against God to mistreat one’s neighbor and to neglect practices of honesty and justice in our relationships. In this way, sin eludes the kind of neat compartmentalization that we might like to use. Our behavior toward our neighbor is a

just measure of our spiritual faithfulness, and deception and dishonesty are ways we fail to love God Himself. Righteousness is horizontal with our neighbor as much as it is vertical with God.

Confession and restitution: these are practices still relevant and important today, grounding us in the reality that we are sinners and need to humbly seek to repair the damage our sin has caused.

Love the Lord
your God . . . Love
your neighbor
as yourself.

Matthew 22:37, 39

Apply the Word

Jesus taught that public worship was an invitation to make right our human relationships (cf. Matthew 6). Before you next attend church, consider where your relationships have suffered. Where have you held grudges or cast judgments or clung to jealousies? Confess these to God and the person you’ve offended, seeking reconciliation.

Pray with Us

It’s our privilege to pray for Ken Heullitt, Chief Financial Officer. Please request that God give Ken and his teams wisdom as they carefully manage the resources that He has entrusted to Moody.

Old Testament Worship: Pointing the Way Forward

Many of us think of the Old Testament as the antithesis of the New Testament and the Mosaic Law as the enemy of the gospel. After all, when was the last time you heard an evangelistic sermon based on the book of Leviticus?

Yet Jesus is threaded all throughout the language of sacrifice. Leviticus is not irrelevant the way we might have once thought. True, Leviticus describes a sacrificial system that's no longer required, but the system is still imbued with layers of meaning. It perfectly and symbolically illustrates what Jesus came to do and why.

Jesus is the holy High Priest, who has entered heaven's throne room to present a sacrifice of atonement. But He did not enter with a slaughtered animal: He entered to surrender His own body and spill His own blood. His blood, unlike the

blood of the Levitical sacrifices, was not carefully drained and collected. Instead, it seeped into the earth, absorbing into all of creation to free it from the power and penalty of sin. He is the perfect Lamb of God on whom we, by a faith confession, transfer our sin.

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:2

He is also the Bread from heaven, restoring the fellowship with God that had been broken in the Garden. By His sacrifice of Himself, we, the unholy, are made holy. We, the unclean, are cleansed. Guilt is erased; sin is paid for; and because of Christ, men and women,

once distanced, are brought near to God.

All of this is symbolized in the Communion meal: the holy blood spilled out, the broken bread of His body. The invitation is made for all: take, eat, drink. Remember the Lord's death until He comes.

Apply the Word

Our life as Christ followers is portrayed in the New Testament in sacrificial language. We follow in the footsteps of Christ, hearing the call to present our bodies as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1). We are described as "the pleasing aroma of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:15). Following Jesus is a life of sacrifice and unreserved devotion to God. Hold nothing back.

Pray with Us

Will you remember in prayer Dr. John Jelinek, Vice President and Dean of Moody Theological Seminary? He provides valuable leadership to Moody's seminary campuses in Chicago, Illinois, and Plymouth, Michigan.

Universal Guilt: Consecrating the Priests

Men and women of humility rarely write on the subject. A pastor of a large American church wrote a book on humility a number of years ago. He's since been under the discipline of his church for sins of pride, having mounted a track record of resisting correction and refusing accountability.

It's one more example that even the "strongest" among us are vulnerable to sin. We are all wrecked; every day we fall to our own pride and selfish desires. None of us is immune to the contagion of sin.

Let us be thankful,
and so worship
God acceptably
with reverence
and awe.

Hebrews 12:28

The ordination ceremony in Leviticus 8 pictures these truths of human frailty and depravity. The construction of the tabernacle has been completed, with its holy furniture and ornamentation. We've come to the moment when Aaron and his sons are consecrated for their priestly work. They will have charge of maintaining the tabernacle and offering

the sacrifices brought by the people for expressions of atonement, thanksgiving, obedience, and worship. This is a holy work commended to an unholy people.

Moses presented offerings on behalf of the priests; they also needed atonement.

Blood must be spilled on their behalf, for the sins they'd committed and will yet commit, for the good they'd already failed to do and will yet neglect. The sacred vestments in which Aaron and his sons were clothed were cleansed and consecrated. Water was the means of purification, and oil

the means of consecration. Every detail illustrates the need for mercy and forgiveness. We cannot approach or serve God by our own merits.

The ordination was a public assembly for all to observe. Every detail was prescribed by God. Worship is serious business. He is holy and requires reverence.

Apply the Word

It can be devastating when our spiritual leaders fail. We often unreasonably expect perfection from them. Let today's reading be a reminder that none of us is perfect, even those called into the ministry. Commit to praying for your pastor and the ministry leaders at your church, that they grow in humility and in the practices of confession and accountability.

Pray with Us

The Board of Trustees gathers today and tomorrow at Moody's Chicago campus for meetings. Join us in asking the Father to guide them by His Spirit to accomplish His will for Moody.

Fire and Blessing: Consuming the Sacrifice

After the death of Steve Jobs, the world waits to see what will become of Apple. Steve Jobs brought the force of his creative leadership to Apple, and no one doubts that the success of Apple—and the innovations of the iPhone, iPod, and iPad—can largely be credited to him.

The world needs great leaders, but leadership is often hard. In today's reading, we see an important transfer of some of that responsibility to Aaron and his sons.

During the seven-day ordination ceremony, Moses presented the sacrifices on behalf of the priests. On the eighth day, he commended to Aaron this work. Aaron must present offerings on his behalf, on behalf of his sons, as well as the entire community. And he was careful to do the work just as God Himself had prescribed.

We draw two important conclusions from the work done by Aaron and his

sons at the altar. First (and as we've already seen), atonement must be made for the people to draw near to God and for Him to draw near to them. Sin will prevent a holy God from communing with an unholy people. The sacrifices symbolize this divide and the need for divine mercy.

**I will make you
into a great
nation, and I will
bless you.**

Genesis 12:2

Second, we see God's grand plan to bless His people. When Aaron finished offering the sacrifices, he raised his hands to bless the people. Atonement is a sure path to joy: God's overriding

impulse is that of blessing: in the Garden, He blessed Adam and Eve. When He called Abraham, He promised him blessings of land and legacy. When He rescued Israel, it was for the purpose of blessing them.

Here, at the entrance to the tabernacle, the fire of God's holy blessing falls, and the people breathe joy and holy fear.

Apply the Word

One of the devil's oldest strategies is to try to convince us that God's plans for us are not good. Have you fallen for that lie? Maybe there's been suffering and great pain in your life, and you questioned the character of God. May you trust and believe today that He is good, and may that faith lead you into deeper joy.

Pray with Us

Will you ask the Lord to give Elizabeth Brown, Vice President and General Counsel, discernment as she offers legal advice to Moody's education, radio, and publishing ministries?

Fire and Judgment: Consuming the Guilty

In his essay, "The Art of Listening," Henning Maskell laments "the constant chatter of the Western world, where no one seems to have the time or even the desire to listen to anyone else. . . . It's as if we have completely lost the ability to listen. We talk and talk, and we end up frightened by silence, the *refuge of those who are at loss for an answer.*"

There are sacred moments of silence in the Bible: Job became speechless before the power of God; Zechariah was made mute by His unbelief; and Aaron, in today's reading, was silenced by fire.

In yesterday's reading, the fire consumed the animal sacrifices offered to God on the altar. It symbolized God's pleasure and acceptance of those sacrifices, and the people responded with great joy. In today's reading, the fire consumed two of Aaron's sons who were guilty of dishonoring God and

disobeying the prescriptions for worship. The fire symbolized God's displeasure and holy judgment, and the people, especially Aaron and his other sons, responded with a paralyzing fear and an inability to speak.

Among those who
approach me I will
be proved holy.

Leviticus 10:3

The sin of Nadab and Abihu was that they had offered "unauthorized fire" (v. 1). As priests, they had been commanded to take burning coals from the altar of burnt offering and use only these coals to burn incense in a hand-held censer. Apparently,

Nadab and Abihu did not burn their incense in the prescribed way and from the prescribed source.

God will be proved holy. He will be honored. The fire He had ignited on the altar of burnt offering symbolized that acceptable atonement had been made for sin. It was this fire alone that provided access to God.

Apply the Word

Although we have complete forgiveness through Christ, we should not be casual with the holiness of God. God's intention in the Bible is to gain glory for Himself. He will not compromise His holiness. We can be tempted to rationalize our sin, but a book like Leviticus brings us back to the sobering and reverent acknowledgement of God's holiness.

Pray with Us

Today over 600 students will graduate at Moody's Spring Commencement ceremony in Chicago. Praise God for these men and women who are committed to serving Christ's Church around the world!

Dietary Laws: Holiness for God's People

A host of books are being published today about the purported health benefits of the Jewish dietary laws. In many cases, these laws did promote good health. Pigs, for instance, were forbidden for consumption, and pigs are among the dirtiest of the farm animals. On the other hand, rabbits could not be eaten, and there is no apparent health benefit for this avoidance.

It's reasonable to assume that God's intentions behind some of the particulars of the dietary laws might have been, in part, to promote good health, although there's nothing explicit in the text to indicate this. The Bible teaches that our bodies are worthy of care. But because not all dietary laws can be traced to healthy practices, we need to look for a broader explanation.

We find the primary reason for the strict classification of clean and unclean animals at the end of chapter 11: the Is-

raelites are called to obey God's laws because they owe Him their allegiance. He has rescued them and now stands in authority over them. And because He is holy, they, too, must be holy.

Holiness isn't moral purity alone. Holiness is the state of being "set apart." These dietary laws did just this for the nation of Israel: they set apart God's people as different from the nations around them. Their food choices reflected this consecrated, holy identity.

Moreover, in Leviticus 11, we find an echo of Genesis 1. The categories for animals in this chapter are the precise ones found in Genesis 1: land animals, birds, sea creatures, and creeping things. But where Genesis 1 had made provision for humanity to eat any creature, the prohibitions found in Leviticus symbolize how creation has become contaminated because of sin.

I am the LORD your
God; consecrate
yourselves and
be holy, because
I am holy.

Leviticus 11:44

Apply the Word

Imagine how revolutionary the words of Jesus were: "The things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them . . . murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt. 15:18, 19). The contaminant wasn't outside a person's body; it was lodged deep within the heart. We would each need a heart transplant!

Pray with Us

Today we go to God in prayer for Moody Radio Florida, reaching Central and Southwest Florida. May God use the ministry of hosts John Block and Kate Bruington to help listeners take the next step in their relationship with Christ.

Unclean: Purification after Childbirth

It's estimated today that a two-parent family with two children will spend \$226,920 to raise each child. Statistics like this feed the cultural trend today to label children as a liability. Children are often seen as a drain on financial resources, an obstacle to professional advancement, and a strain on already depleted environmental resources.

This isn't the biblical view. Children were always considered of enormous value, in both the Old and New Testaments. The passage in Leviticus 12, however, gives rise to some serious questions. If sacrificial offerings must be made following

the birth of a child, and if a new mother is ritually unclean because of childbirth, is there something inherently sinful or bad about having children?

No. The issue is not that the woman is morally unclean after childbirth, but ritually unclean. The new mother has not

sinned, but rather, her postnatal flow of blood disqualifies her from the ceremonies of public worship. This parallels the prohibition against eating the blood of animals. Only the priests were permitted to handle blood, and this only for presenting the sacrifices of atonement.

The LORD
appeared to
Abram and said,
"To your offspring
I will give
this land."

Genesis 12:7

Today's reading has echoes of themes in Genesis. Just as Adam and Eve were excluded from the Garden of Eden because of their sin, so the unclean woman is excluded from public worship because of her ritual contamination. But the hope that had been announced in the garden

long ago in the promise of a holy "seed" or offspring for redemption, is called to mind in verse 1 of today's reading. The phrase, "a woman who becomes pregnant," when literally translated from the Hebrew means, "a women who produces a seed." Mary, young virgin mother of Jesus, would become ritually impure to bear the holy Seed of the Messiah.

Apply the Word

Postnatal blood and menstrual blood were both sources of ritual contamination for a woman. Imagine then the bold faith of the woman who had suffered a bleeding disorder for twelve years and dared to touch the hem of Jesus' robe (Luke 8:42-47). Jesus turned to her and said, "Go in peace." He comes to bring the impure and the unclean back to God.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody Radio Florida, ask the Father to bring many listeners into a new relationship with Jesus Christ through the ministry of Pierre Chestang, Ron Maxwell, and John Stortz.

Question and Answer

Dr. David Rim, Professor of Theology



My good friend died recently. She told me she never wanted to see or speak to her two sisters. One sister had an affair with my friend's husband, and the other sister defended her actions. I guess my friend never forgave her sisters. Does God take you to heaven when you persist in unforgiveness?



Even a quick reading of the Gospels is sufficient for the reader to realize how important forgiveness is to the Christian life. The spiritual life of every believer begins with an act of divine forgiveness. All sins are washed away. Having said this, however, how are we to understand those who do not want to forgive, or can't seem to forgive? There are two directions one can take. First, an unwillingness to forgive is a sign that one is not walking in the light of God's continual grace. Such an individual will not experience intimacy with God where His peace and rest fill the heart. But since God has already forgiven all of their sins, and since the act of not forgiving another is a sin, people caught in the grip of unforgiveness will still experience the full eschatological promises of God.

The second direction is to argue that an inability or an unwillingness to forgive, when it becomes a defining aspect of one's spiritual life, can be a

sign that one has not truly embraced the forgiveness of God in the first place. Forgiveness has a transformative quality. It is not merely passive, where your debts are no longer charged against you. The very act of being forgiven transforms people's heart to such a degree that they forgive others who have sinned against them. They have been gifted with a new heart and spirit. In this view, an inability to forgive is a sign of a dead spirit. See Matthew 18:23–35 for Jesus' parable that explores the relationship between God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others.

As for your friend, God knows her heart. His mercy is great. And this very fact is one reason each of us should be careful of persisting in unforgiveness. We have been forgiven much, and should follow the example of Christ in forgiving those who sin against us.



Is there an easy way to explain that Jesus is God? I witness to a person who can't seem to accept that fact. He says, "If Jesus is God, then how did He die? God can't die! So Jesus is not God." I have shared some Scripture with him, but I need help explaining it.



This is a question that most Christians struggle with at some point. Where do

Continued on next page

God never tries to explain away difficult times in our life.

Continued from previous page

people's ideas of God come from? Generally, there are three sources. The first is from religion. In a debate with William Lane Craig, the Muslim theologian Jamal Badawi argued that Jesus cannot be God because there were things He did not know. For him, a God who experienced states of ignorance was not worthy of that title.

The second source is our innate sense of what a god should look like. The medieval theologian Anselm believed that when one reflected upon a concept of God, the idea of perfection would emerge as the central core of who God was. If it is a good thing for a being to know truths, then God, being perfect, would know all truths. A third source is an individual who claims to be God, and using that person as the basis for developing our concept of God.

These sources overlap. For example, in order to assess a person's claim to divinity, one must have some idea of what it means to be God to begin the examination. But if the person passes, shouldn't that individual bring something to the table that modifies or completes our initial concept of God?

We have the person of Jesus Christ claiming to be God. How were the Jews in the first century able to assess this claim? Jesus used several means to show how He fit into their idea of the divine: He claimed to be eternal (John 8:58); He applied the divine name to Himself (John 4:26); He exercised the

authority to forgive (Mark 2:5); He demonstrated power by calming the sea (Mark 4:39); and He can meet our basic needs, like the God in Israel's history (Mark 6:41-44). For these reasons, some of the Jews followed Jesus as the visible incarnation of God. But others rejected Him, partly because He did not fit their preconceived ideas of God. How can a God of absolute holiness associate with known sinners? What kind of God violates His own Sabbath laws? And most significant of all, how can the mighty Creator of the universe experience pain and suffering, even to the point of death?

This is the crossroad. Either my preconceived notions of God invalidate Jesus' claim to divinity because I am absolutely sure that God cannot die, or my initial conception of God must be revised to include this new information that God can die. Everyone who names the name of Jesus Christ as their ultimate source of hope must take the latter route. They submit their notions of divinity at the foot of the cross, and allow their experience of Christ to modify not only the way they view the world and themselves but also the way they view God. This does not mean that I comprehend the depths of this new information. But it does give me a real picture of the profoundness of His love for me. To the degree that I find it utterly incomprehensible that God can die, that is the degree to which my heart is called to worship the One who did the incomprehensible.

Unclean: Skin Diseases

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition—or the DSM-IV—is the manual used by mental health professionals for diagnosing and treating mental illness. Since its publication in 1952, it’s been revised four times, removing disorders previously considered pathological and adding new ones.

Leviticus 13 reads like an infectious disease manual. But just as we’ve seen in our previous days’ readings regarding the dietary laws and the ritual purification required after

childbirth, skin disease is not necessarily a medical or moral issue. What’s in focus here is determining when a person is ceremonially clean or unclean, fit or unfit for participation in the community.

The priests arbitrated these matters of skin diseases, determining which ones prevented a person from entering the tabernacle. The criterion seems to be whether a condition was acute or chron-

ic. Persons with chronic skin conditions that did not heal over a period of time of isolation were to be excluded from community worship as well as from habitation in the camp.

Imagine the horror the unclean men and women inspired when they patrolled the outskirts of the camp, yelling, “Unclean!” Imagine their tragic loneliness. They were not being punished for sin, although no doubt it must have felt like it to some.

They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.

Leviticus 13:46

The exclusion did, however, act as a kind of protective measure over the community, whose close living quarters could breed infection. Vigilance was exercised over unclean materials because any contagion of mold or disease had the possibility of spreading quickly throughout the camp, putting everyone at risk. Symbolically, this illustrates the horrors of sin in its ability to contaminate and destroy.

Apply the Word

Each of us has been infected by sin. We are unclean, and without a new birth by which we’re given new spiritual skin, we cannot draw near to God. Jesus has made a way for forgiveness and spiritual rebirth by dying for unclean sinners. “And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood” (Heb. 13:12).

Pray with Us

Keeping our prayers focused on Moody Radio, let’s lift up Moody Radio West Michigan. As Scott Curtis and Jack Haveman work hard to create a place where listeners can turn for truth and hope, ask God to bless their efforts and encourage their hearts.

Pronouncing Clean: The Ceremony and Its Symbolism

Many ancient religious rituals included superstitious practices whose goal was to appease the wrath of the gods. Some might view the text we read today the same way. We feel suspect about all the bizarre ceremony of it all. Upon closer examination, we'll see that these symbols are full of meaning.

What is being described here is the ceremonial cleansing that takes place when a ritually unclean person has been healed of his disease. He wasn't reintegrated into the community immediately. Instead, the priest visited the person outside the camp, made the pronouncement that he was clean, and invited him back into the camp where he had to wait seven days before entering his tent. On the eighth day, the person to be cleansed offered appropriate guilt, sin, and fellowship offerings to the Lord.

Many scholars have drawn parallels between this ritual ceremony of cleans-

ing and the Flood account in Genesis. First, in both, the agent of cleansing is water. In Leviticus, the unclean person bathes and washes his clothes, having been sprinkled with the blood of the bird killed over fresh water. In Genesis, an unclean world undergoes a cleansing by a disastrous flood, the means by which God wipes away sin and begins anew. Second, the appearance of birds in both stories provides a link. Two birds are used in the ceremonial cleansing: one killed over fresh water, one dipped in its

blood. In the Flood story, birds are released when the rain stops and Noah waits to leave the ark. And finally, both the ceremonial cleansing and the Flood narrative conclude with sacrifices.

Leviticus is drawing on larger themes from the Pentateuch, highlighting God's great desire for relationship with His people and man's great need for redemption and rescue.

Noah built an altar
to the LORD and
... sacrificed
burnt offerings.

Genesis 8:20

Apply the Word

The overwhelming balance of the New Testament, when it comes to the language of sacrifice, is the focus on Jesus Christ. No other sacrifice is required. Only two mentions are made of sacrifices we actually offer to God: the sacrifice of our money for the advancement of mission (Phil. 4:18) and the sacrifice of praise we offer God from our lips (Heb. 13:15).

Pray with Us

Will you pray for Greg Thornton, Senior Vice President of Media? Greg leads Moody Radio and Moody Publishers, ministries committed to proclaiming the gospel in creative and powerful ways to help people become more devoted followers of Christ.

Principle of Separation

In December 1952, five days of suffocating smog hovered over the city of London. In the following weeks, medical reports estimated that over 4,000 people died, and 100,000 people fell ill. This environmental catastrophe made way for new legislative policies, such as the Clean Air Act of 1956.

The book of Leviticus addresses its own kind of contaminant: the bodily diseases, dysfunctions, and discharges, all of which make a person ceremonially unclean. Today's reading brings us into the secrecy of one's bedroom and bathroom, launching us into the awkward discussion of bodily fluids.

Semen and menstrual blood are both contaminants. No one entered the tabernacle for seven days following menstruation or contact with a menstruating woman; an emission of semen or contact with it made people unclean until sun-

down. This meant that women were ritually unclean nearly half of every month. Men were also frequently unclean. Not only was the person with the discharge unclean, but anything he or she touched was unclean: cooking pots, riding saddles, beds, chairs.

Come out from
them and be
separate. . . .
Touch no unclean
thing, and I will
receive you.

2 Corinthians 6:17

Laid out are strict rules of separation in order to prevent contamination. The reason for the severity of these restrictions is explained in verse 31. Contamination is probable; therefore, every person must keep himself from what would make him ritually unclean in order that he might worship a holy God.

Remember the general purpose of the Pentateuch? Moses wrote to explain to the nation of Israel their newfound identity as God's people. God had chosen to make His dwelling right in their midst, and in response, they were to endeavor to be holy.

Apply the Word

The principle of separation is one that stands even in the New Testament. (Note today's key verse.) We've been called, not to conformity with the world, but to transformed lives of holiness. And yet we hold this in tension with the compassionate example of Jesus, which we have in the Gospels. He kept company with sinners and touched those who were unclean.

Pray with Us

Will you pray for Moody Publishers Operations: Ann Hackler, Mattie Hill, Elisabeth Ireland, and Sandy Kleinhans? May these employees experience the peace of Christ as they go about their work today.

Day of Atonement: A Day of Grace

Yom Kippur, or the Jewish Day of Atonement, is still a day of solemn reflection and fasting. One Jewish woman explains, “When the fast is over, the hope is that your prayers were answered, and you were written in the Book of Life and it will be a good year.”

Believers in Christ can count on more than simply hoping that God has heard our prayers and forgiven our sins. Jesus’ death on the cross, perfectly figured in the ceremony described here, was the finally sufficient atoning sacrifice for our sins. Tomorrow, we’ll explore that symbolism.

Today, we take a broader view of the Day of Atonement. First, we note the previous breach of priestly protocol. Nadab and Abihu died when they approached the Lord inappropriately (see May 12). Aaron was stunned into silence by this swift expression of God’s

judgment and probably felt reluctant to resume his priestly duties.

On the one hand, the Day of Atonement was certainly a day for appropriate fear. It highlighted God’s unconditional holiness. The high priest could enter the

Holy of Holies only once a year, and when he did, he had to bring blood sacrifices both for himself and his family as well as for the entire nation. The incense burning on his censer was meant to obscure a view of the cover of the atonement seat; he

was forbidden to look upon God. Every part of the ceremony signified a careful approach of the living God. The penalty of any misstep was death.

But while the ceremony inspired fear, it was also an expression of grace. Despite their sin and unworthiness, this great God of Israel had made His dwelling in their midst and made provisions for approaching Him.

Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.

Leviticus 16:34

Apply the Word

An important reason to read a book like Leviticus is to shape our view of God. Culture today encourages people to believe what they want to believe. Inevitably, people draw conclusions about God according to their own preferences. The truth is, however, that God is not who we want Him to be but who He has revealed Himself to be in the Scriptures.

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for Moody Publishers Operations, let’s support Duane Koenig, Ryan Lloyd, and Gregory Miller in prayer. Ask God to guide them in making even the smallest of decisions.

Day of Atonement: Forgiveness Made Complete in Jesus

In the book, *Devil at My Heels*, Louis Zamperini tells his incredible life story. As a World War II bombardier, he was captured by the Japanese and tortured as a POW for two years. Later, Zamperini met Jesus and was granted the power to forgive those who had beaten and tortured him.

God's heart pulses with forgiveness. He wants to show mercy and to forgive sin. The rituals of the Day of Atonement, performed only once a year, were a picture of the people of God securing His forgiveness and mercy. The symbolism of these rituals is rich with meaning, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus.

The author of Hebrews works to draw out the connections to the Old Testament priestly code and ceremony with the New Testament gospel. First, he explains what was insufficient in the old covenant. All of the prescriptions for the sacrifices, all the regulations for

worship—these never did complete the full work of forgiveness. Those who came to the tabernacle with their offerings left with the nagging sense that they were still failures, undeserving of God's mercy. The blood of bulls and goats had a superficial kind of effect. They could declare a person ceremonially clean, but they could not fully absolve the conscience (v. 9).

Jesus, whose sacrifice was made in heaven, not the tabernacle, brought before God His own perfect blood. There was no need to bring sacrifice for His own sin, only the sin of the people. There was no need to repeat the sacrifice year after year. It was complete and final from the very beginning. And His blood had a power that the blood of bulls and goats did not: it had the power to free people from guilt and their terrifying sense of failure, and to commission them for the purpose of priestly service.

**I will forgive their
wickedness and
will remember
their sins no more.**

Hebrews 8:12

Apply the Word

Have you experienced the free and freeing forgiveness of God? Or does your conscience remain tortured, replaying scenes of your failures and past sins? God's desire is that you walk in the freedom of His forgiveness. Share with a friend how you're struggling to receive God's forgiveness, and have that friend pray for you.

Pray with Us

Today we commit to praying for the staff serving in Moody Publishers Fulfillment: Michael Alcazar, Junico Arroz, Lee Denton, and Arthur Eastern. These men work diligently in the warehouse, servicing customer orders.

Narrative Shift: Holiness for Everyone

In December 2011, troops were called to the Church of the Nativity to break up a fight between the monks. The Church, considered the traditional site of Jesus' birth, is maintained by three denominations—Roman Catholics, Armenians, and Greek Orthodox. Apparently, this particular day the denominational disagreements had gotten out of hand.

Christians visit this site and others, but we have never had one authorized holy place for worship. The Israelites had been instructed by God to worship at the tabernacle and later in the temple. They had been making animal sacrifices in the wilderness; this was not a new practice. Now that the tabernacle has been completed, however, God commanded that all sacrifices be brought to the tabernacle and offered to Him there. The penalty for not doing so was severe: exclusion from the community of Israel.

They must bring [the sacrifices] to the priest, that is, to the LORD, at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Leviticus 17:5

Centralizing the worship of God at the tabernacle was a protection against idolatry. God had declared the ways by which He could be approached. He had prescribed the kind of animals He would accept and the specific ways they were to be slaughtered and offered. Those who chose to disregard these prescriptions and offer animal sacrifices anywhere outside the tabernacle were actually participating in idol worship and guilty of bloodshed.

These nine verses that we read today form a kind of narrative shift between the first and second halves of Leviticus. The first sixteen chapters of Leviticus, or the Priestly Code, prescribe the rituals of worship and the requirements of the priests. The second half of the book, or the Holiness Code, turns its focus from the requirements of the priests to the holy commands given to the entire community.

Apply the Word

Old covenant practices have been abolished, but some principles remain true. In Leviticus, we see that God is addressing not individuals, but an entire community of people. This is also true in the New Testament where following Christ is not exclusively an individual pursuit but a call to identify oneself with a holy community of believers.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody Publishers Fulfillment team, let's ask the Lord to give safety and strength to Ernesto Laya, Chieu Nguyen, James Seffinga, James Tran, and Matthew Tran as they pack and ship book orders today.

Blood: Life, Death, and Atonement

In 1945, a new doctrine was introduced into the dogma of beliefs held by Jehovah's Witnesses. It prohibits their adherents from accepting blood transfusions or donating their own blood for transfusion. Perhaps they had been reading from the pages of Leviticus.

The smell and sight of blood greeted any worshiper who came to the tabernacle. All throughout Leviticus, we've seen the critical importance of blood. For the ritual sacrifices, the priests took special care of the blood they drained from the slaughtered animals: most often, it was sprinkled on the altar of burnt offering, but at other times, it was sprinkled on the outside of the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Once a year, the high priest carried the blood of the sacrifices with him into the Holy of Holies, sprinkling it on the atonement cover of the ark.

We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.

Hebrews 10:19

At other times, blood was used in the ordination ceremonies of the priests. It was applied to the right ear, right thumb, and right big toe of the priests who were being anointed. Blood also figured in the cleansing rituals for both people and houses. Blood, having these special significances, was forbidden for consumption. Any person who hunted and slaughtered an animal must drain the blood and bury it.

All this reverence was paid to blood in all the ritual ceremonies of Leviticus because blood was a symbol of life. Because God and God alone is the giver and sustainer of life, people could not treat casually either human or animal life. Moreover, blood was used to make atonement. Sin incurred the penalty of death, and the only rescue from death came as a result of the principle of exchange, when life was given for death.

Apply the Word

Our key verse tells us that it's Jesus' blood that gives us confidence to enter the Most Holy Place. The exclusive and solemn privilege of the high priest granted only once a year is now ours to enjoy at any moment of every day. Take time to absorb the grace of God that has made this possible through Jesus, giving Him praise.

Pray with Us

Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody's President, requests your prayers for Moody's Pastors' Conference held at our Chicago campus this week. May God use Dr. Nyquist and other keynote speakers to minister to the pastors in attendance.

Sexual Ethics and Economic Justice

Entire denominations are fracturing over the issue of homosexuality in the church, some defending traditional biblical interpretations that forbid homosexual practice, others going so far as to ordain practicing homosexuals.

Today's reading confronts us with sexual ethics. What is and is not forbidden? Clearly, this passage protects marriage and prohibits the practices of incest, homosexuality, adultery, and any sexual contact between humans and animals. These are associated with the cultural mores of the heathen nations, most specifically Egypt and Canaan (vv. 23–30).

God insists that He is their God, and they must obey His authority. He intends they be a holy people, distinctive not only because of the way they worship but also for how they conduct their relationships. His prohibitions aren't exclusive to regulating private, intimate relationships; He

also insists on fair business practice and just economic policy. It's important to notice that both are equally important to God. Obedience, both in the private and public sector, is an expression of fearing the Lord and acknowledging that He is witness to everything we do—in the bedroom as well as in the field.

**Act justly and love
mercy and walk
humbly with
your God.**

John 15:14

Provision is made to care for the poor and the immigrant. God's people were to be lax when harvesting and gleaning; what they left behind after a first gleaning was to be left for the poor. All relationships were to depend on

the principles of fairness and honesty. Employers were required to pay fair wages. Everyone was commanded to care for the less fortunate and the handicapped. The essence of the Law is summarized in verse 18: "Love your neighbor as yourself." To keep sexual expression within the confines of marriage, to take care of the marginalized—these were ways to honor the Lord and honor one another.

Apply the Word

As Christians, we are right to defend the sacredness of marriage. But just as vehemently, we must also speak up against injustice such as global poverty, racial discrimination, and economic injustice. As reflected in our passage today, we see God's great concern for both sets of issues, neither of which should be ignored.

Pray with Us

Moody's Sports Ministry Department teaches students how to use the universal language of sports to reach people with the gospel. Let's pray for Undergraduate School faculty serving in the Sports Ministry Department: Dana Daly and Daniel Dunn.

Expulsion and Death: Severe Penalties for Sin

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* tells the story of Hester Prynne and her daughter, Pearl, whom she's borne as a result of an adulterous affair. Because of her sin, Hester suffers a painful expulsion from her seventeenth-century New England community.

Hawthorne draws on biblical themes of sin and its penalty: from the very beginning, the penalty of sin has been alienation and exclusion. Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden and alienated from God and each other. Cain, when he murdered his brother, Abel, was excluded from community and condemned to spending his life as a restless wanderer. Sin wrecks the fellowship we were created by God to enjoy.

Many of the sins catalogued in Leviticus carry this same penalty of exclusion. When people are found guilty of certain sins, such as consulting a medium, they

are to be cut off from the protection and provisions that the community affords. But there remains an even more severe penalty. Capital punishment, carried out by the members of the community, was legal. A person could be put to death for sins we might find rather innocuous like cursing his parents, or sins we know are serious but not lethal like committing adultery, as well as sins we find horrific such as practicing child sacrifice.

The severity of punishment reveals just how serious God was about the holiness of His people. He had rescued them and

set them apart from the surrounding nations. And what was at stake was not only their well-being (for obedience is in fact a means to joy and blessing) but also the proper revering of God's name. Again, we look forward to Christ, knowing that He took the penalty for our sin, suffering alienation, even death, for the sake of making us holy.

You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you.

Leviticus 20:23

Apply the Word

How serious a matter is sin to you? Are you tempted to treat it casually? In what ways are you committed to the practice of regular confession? Who is it that you tell when you're struggling and failing? And what are the evidences of repentance in your life? How have you put off habits of sin and put on new practices of righteousness?

Pray with Us

Will you continue praying for faculty serving in the Sports Ministry Department at Moody's Chicago campus? Praise the Lord for Joseph Harding and Jean Penfound who are helping students prepare for a lifetime of serving Jesus.

Responsibilities of Leadership: Holiness of Priests

Every time a well-known evangelical leader with public testimony or ministry falls into ethical and moral failure, we all regret the shadows that are cast over the church and the gospel. Christian leaders are accountable to God. That is why the qualifications for pastors and elders in the New Testament are so stringent and also why it's insisted upon in Leviticus that priests stay morally and ceremonially clean. If they were unclean in any way, they could not be permitted to continue serving in their priestly role and offering daily sacrifices.

Not many of you
should become
teachers . . .
because you know
that we who teach
will be judged
more strictly.

James 3:1

The old covenant, unlike the new, was dependent upon the priests to represent the nation to God. The priests were not perfect, sinless men. They had to offer sacrifices on their own behalf, needing atonement just as much as any other member of the community. They were as likely to face the possibility of ritual contamination. As was true for others,

certain foods were forbidden for consumption by the priests, and they had to maintain separation from anything and anyone unclean.

Unlike for other Israelites, stricter regulations were instituted for the priests and especially for the high priest. They were permitted no contact with the dead, except in the case of the death of an immediate family member. The high priest was not even allowed to bury a mother or father. Even in the case of choosing whom they would marry, priests could not marry

divorced women or women who had been scandalized by engaging in prostitution. The high priest could not marry a widow: his future wife must be a virgin.

Unfortunately, it's not long after the Jews enter the Promised Land that even the priests would be guilty of betraying God's commands.

Apply the Word

If you have the responsibilities for Bible teaching or any other type of spiritual leadership, you know how much your example means. Do you live the words that you proclaim? Is there integrity to be found in what you say and what you do? While you're not expected to be perfect, it's still a sobering truth that you'll be judged more strictly.

Pray with Us

Dr. Thomas Shaw, Vice President of Student Services, leads departments such as Admissions, Food Service, and Academic Records. Please join us in asking the Father to help Tom and his teams care for the needs of our students.

Celebration and Confession: Holy Days and Feasts

Puritans opposed special holiday observances like Christmas and Easter; settlers were actually forced to pay fines for feasting on those days. “They for whom all days are holy can have no holiday,” was a common Puritan saying.

Maybe the Puritans would have benefitted from our reading in Leviticus 23. God Himself outfitted the calendar of the Jewish nation around the observance of holy feasts and assemblies. They are called “appointed festivals of the LORD,” occasions for rejoicing and celebration (v. 2).

For three pilgrim feasts (the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Tabernacles), men were expected to travel to Jerusalem. After the conquest of the land and as the tribes spread out to possess it, Jerusalem would be the place of holy assembly.

These are my appointed festivals, . . . which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.

Leviticus 23:2

The Passover and the Day of Atonement were the holiest days of the Jewish calendar. The Passover was observed in the first month of every year, kicking off the weeklong observance of the Festival of Weeks. Embedded in this holiday was the retelling of how God had miraculously delivered the Jews from Egypt. During this feast, the Jews brought their offerings of firstfruits, which served as a tangible way of acknowledging how God had brought them into this land. The Day of Atonement was a more somber day of reflection. The Jews observed it while

fasting, and the week that followed called for living in temporary shelters. Those were reminders of their wilderness journeying.

Each celebration rooted the nation in the stories of God’s goodness and power. He had shown Himself faithful to them in Egypt as well as in the wilderness.

Apply the Word

Although the prominent festivals were an important part of each calendar year, the Sabbath was a regular way of reminding the Jews of their dependence on God. Sabbath continues to be an important way to enjoy the rest, to worship, and to declare dependence on God. How have you made these things a priority in your life?

Pray with Us

We invite you to pray for Moody Radio’s Integrated Marketing team: Michael Chapin, Debbie Douglas, Scott Krus, and David Woodworth. Ask the Lord to give this team creativity in promoting new and existing Moody Radio programs.

Lex Talionis: The Principle of Retribution

The principle of *lex talionis*, or the law of retaliation, was an important part of Old Testament Law. Rather than legislating violent action, it was actually intended to mitigate vengeance. The penalty for a crime could be no more severe than the crime itself.

Our passage today is not all law: it first opens with further instructions concerning the duties of the priests. They tended to the nightly lighting of the golden lampstand, and weekly, they prepared the twelve sacred loaves of bread. Both are symbolic of God's good work of creation and covenant, themes we've already traced in Leviticus. The light of the lampstand calls to mind God's first words of creation: "Let there be light." And by the pillar of cloud and fire, God illuminated the path of the Israelites as they left Egypt. Bread is the symbol of God's provision, reminding us of the table God set for Adam and Eve. They were permitted to nourish them-

Fracture for
fracture, eye
for eye, tooth
for tooth.

Leviticus 24:20

selves from the goodness of God's creation. And in the wilderness, it was of course the bread that fell from heaven, which kept alive the wandering Israelites. These items also point forward to Christ, who declared "I am the light of the world," and "I am the bread of life" (John 8:12; John 6:35).

The passage abruptly turns from instructions for the priests to a narrative retelling. It's only the second story told in Leviticus. (The first was about Nadab and Abihu.) This

narrative is another portrait of sin: a man of mixed heritage is heard blaspheming God's holy name. He is put to death by the command of God at the hands of the community. This is not an act of murder, for a distinction is clearly drawn in this passage between capital punishment and murder.

According to the principle of *lex talionis*, or an eye for an eye, all crimes should be punished swiftly but justly.

Apply the Word

In debates over appropriate criminal penalties, Christians should support principles outlined in Scripture. God favors justice, with penalties in proportion to the crime. They are not to be applied out of vengeance or pleasure. Vulnerable members of society must not be exploited. God's justice is mingled with His mercy, and ours should be as well.

Pray with Us

Dr. Junias Venugopal, Provost and Dean of Education, requests your prayers for the end of this Spring semester. May God give Junias and his team passion and perseverance as they help prepare the ministry leaders God has entrusted to us.

Jubilee: Provisions for the Poor/Stewardship of the Land

Katharine Hayhoe might be considered a paradox. She is a Christian climate scientist. The daughter of missionaries, the wife of a pastor, Hayhoe explains, “My faith is the Christian faith . . . and we are told to love our neighbors as ourselves. And our neighbors, especially the poorer ones, are already harmed by climate change.”

It’s clear that Scripture insists on a proper care and stewardship of the earth. Today’s reading explains that not only did God insist upon a weekly Sabbath observance for His people, or a day consecrated to rest, He also commanded a Sabbath rest for the land. Every seven years, the Israelites were to refrain from planting and sowing, reaping and harvesting. The land was to lay fallow, resting and replenishing.

The question Moses anticipates is this: “What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?”

That strikes at the heart of what Sabbath is really meant to do. Sabbath, whether it’s a day we set aside for rest and worship, or a year we set aside for the earth to replenish, is an expression of courageous trust. It reminds us that it is not our work that secures for us our livelihood. It is God who provides us with all that we need.

**You must not
rule over your
fellow Israelites
ruthlessly.**

Leviticus 25:46

Beyond a Sabbath for the land every seventh year, God ordained the practice of Jubilee to be observed every fifty years. This required more

dramatic dependence on the part of the Israelites. Jubilee was a provision of protection for the poor: it called for debt cancellation. Land and homes were returned to the rightful owner as prescribed by family heritage.

Jubilee is not veiled socialism, or simple redistribution according to principles of fairness. It was a way to acknowledge that no one but God owned the land.

Apply the Word

What would the practice of Jubilee look like today? What kinds of debts can you cancel for others? Maybe you can forgive some financial obligations. Or maybe you can forgive someone’s offense against you and work to restore the relationship. On a larger scale, how can our churches practice the kind of reconciliation in the principle of Jubilee?

Pray with Us

MBI—Spokane is Moody Bible Institute’s Undergraduate School located in the Pacific Northwest. Join us in asking the Lord to give continued unity to MBI—Spokane faculty and administration: Jonathan Armstrong, Daniel Churchwell, Jack Lewis, and Wendy Liddell.

Costly Giving: Freewill Offerings and Vows

We might be cynical about promises. Politicians promise not to raise taxes, professional athletes promise they haven't used steroids, and celebrities say, "I do," many of their marriages ending disastrously, sometimes within a matter of weeks.

Leviticus ends with a chapter concerning vows, and they are to be taken seriously. The vows are made publicly to the priests in the presence of the Lord, rescinded only when one paid the value of the item along with an additional 20 percent. Moreover, these vows aren't to be

superficial gestures of devotion. They are freewill offerings in addition to the obligatory gifts required of the Israelites, such as the offerings of the firstborn or the required tithe.

Each gift was appraised by the priest. At first glance, we might wonder how one can assign monetary value to a person.

And because men and women are valued differently, are we to believe that God esteems men more than women? Upon closer look, it's important to notice that the values assigned to the people are accorded with the potential productivity of their labor. Most valued is a

man between the ages of 20 and 60. Because men are generally physically stronger than women, they have the potential for doing more of the manual work that would have been required in this ancient society. A woman of this same age group was valued more highly than an elderly man for

apparently the same reason.

Because the Levites alone were responsible for the priestly duties and care of the tabernacle, devoting someone to the Lord would not likely mean enrolling them in the ministry. It could instead look like paying the equivalent value to the Lord as a substitution.

Make vows to the
LORD your God
and fulfill them; . . .
bring gifts to
the One to
be feared.

Psalms 76:11

Apply the Word

David once insisted that he would never offer to the Lord something that cost him nothing (2 Sam. 23:15–17). The relative value assigned to each of these freewill offerings was high, especially in light of the fact that a day's wage was ordinarily about one shekel. It prods us to consider our own giving. Do we give sacrificially? What does our giving really cost us?

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for faculty and administration serving at MBI—Spokane, please ask the Father to supply His sustaining grace to John McMath, Jennifer Mills, Michael Orr, and Christopher Rappazini.

Blessings for Obedience

If we've become wary of the promises of our politicians, imagine hearing one insist that by the end of his or her elected term, prosperity would be completely restored and our national security completely guaranteed.

God makes promises—and keeps them. He's no long-winded politician just trying to garner a few more votes. As the book of Leviticus draws to a close, God reiterates all the good intentions and purposes He has for His people. These are deliberate echoes of the promises of creation and of covenant, purposes to multiply His people, to dwell among them and make them fully His. Like a sovereign king, He will bring under His protection those who swear to Him their allegiance. He will ensure their national security, making their enemies flee before them. Despite all the ways they've yet been unfaithful, He had not relented from His desire to do them great good.

**LORD Almighty,
blessed is the one
who trusts in you.**

John 20:17

The locus of the blessing is not only the people themselves but by extension the land. The land, as well as the people, will be fruitful. The fields and orchards will produce abundant yields. God will continue to do what He's done in the desert: He will feed His people, nourishing them and attending to their daily needs. Ultimately, what God seems to be saying is this: Do not be afraid. I love you, I will care for you, and I only ask that you obey Me fully.

That contingency is of course the real sticking point. God demanded their complete loyalty, forbidding any kind of idol worship. Everyone must bow to His authority, acknowledging the rescue He had already performed on their behalf. He is the LORD, and it is His to command what they will do and whom they will worship.

We know that the nation will not be able to fulfill the demands of the covenant.

Apply the Word

Remember the promises of the new covenant, which God would establish through Jesus (cf. Jeremiah 31). He would, by His Spirit, perform heart surgery on His people to transform us from the inside out, thereby securing our loyalty. Praise God for His grace. He doesn't give up, even when we disregard His goodness and disobey His commands.

Pray with Us

Keeping our prayers focused on MBI–Spokane, lift up faculty and administration serving at this campus: Carie Ritz, Floyd Schneider, and Gerald Vreeland. May God use these individuals to transform students' lives and ministries for His glory.

Curses for Disobedience

Parenting has its trends, and new books are being marketed every year with tricks and tips for parents. “Positive parenting” is a recently acclaimed method. It teaches parents never to use any punishment or negative consequence but to manage their children with the use of rewards and praise.

Positive parenting was not the sole method God Himself employed with His children. At the beginning of the chapter, His people were promised a host of rewards and blessings contingent upon their obedience; as we read further, great suffering and pain are threatened for their disobedience. God isn’t setting up a simple accounting system of checks and minuses or a behavior management plan such as we might see in elementary school classroom. What’s in place is the principle of sowing and reaping. Blessing will always have its rewards; sin will always have its consequences.

I will not
reject them . . .
so as to destroy
them completely,
breaking my
covenant with
them.

Leviticus 26:44

All throughout the Bible, God makes clear that He wants what’s best for His people. His plans and purposes are good and can be trusted. His commands actually serve as a kind of protective measure for His people, put in place to guide them into what is good and to protect them from what is harmful. Disobedience doesn’t just elicit God’s angry response. By its very nature, it actually leads to forms of death and destruction. That is why God insists that His people obey Him—not simply so that He can be in charge but so that we can be cared for.

Notice the words used for obedience and disobedience in this passage. To obey is synonymous with the verbs to follow, to listen, to carry out. To disobey means to reject, to abhor, to fail, to violate, and even to show hostility. All of these words are active, implying deliberateness and intention. Sin and obedience aren’t accidental.

Apply the Word

As severe as these warnings are, and as serious as God is about His intolerance of sin, He will still continue to show mercy. Even when His people fail Him, their confession will be met with immediate grace. He will withhold the full weight of His justice, remembering the covenant. What hope for the days when we’ve really made a mess of things!

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for MBI–Spokane, will you remember Student Services: Tina Armagost, Leah Schneider, and Daniel Ward? Thank God for their efforts that support students’ spiritual, emotional, and academic development.

Levitical Themes in New Testament Clothes

Some Christians find it difficult to reconcile the Old and New Testaments. They might characterize the God of the Old Testament as vengeful and angry, the God of the New as merciful and loving.

Hopefully through our study of Leviticus, and especially as we conclude today with a look at Ephesians 5, we have seen that there's no distinction between the God of the Old and New Testaments. The themes of Scripture are consistent. In fact, the book of Leviticus has the power to illuminate our understanding of the gospel.

All throughout Leviticus, we've been looking at the sacrificial system, understanding that without blood sacrifice there can be no atonement for sin. Ephesians uses this language of Leviticus but applies it to Christ. Jesus was the fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. He fulfilled the requirement of

blood payment for sin. He is the faithful high priest as well as the sufficient sacrifice, an incarnated salvation.

Leviticus has also inspired in us reverence for God's holiness. In the story of Nadab and Abihu and the later story of the blasphemer, we saw fierce expressions of God's wrath. Note that Ephesians makes reference to this aspect of God's holy character: God has always reserved wrath and judgment for disobedience, both then and now.

And in him you
too are being
built together to
become a dwelling
in which God lives
by his Spirit.

Ephesians 2:22

Because God is holy, He requires holiness of His people. In Leviticus, laws regulated ritual purity as a demonstration that men and women needed to be clean before a holy God. Ephesians explores not ritual purity but holy character and conduct. Although we have been saved by grace, we're not entitled to live life as we please or to pay no attention to moral boundaries.

Apply the Word

We are the dwelling place of God. The candles that burned in the tabernacle from evening to morning—that is our flame (Eph. 5:8). The burning incense that perfumed the air—that is our fragrance (2 Cor. 2:14). We are a witness to the world of the holy God who delights to forgive sin and to show mercy. To whom will you tell this good news today?

Pray with Us

Thank you for joining us for this month's study of Leviticus. As you reflect on the theme of holiness woven throughout this book, worship the Lord for His holiness and praise Him for making us holy through the sacrifice of His Son.

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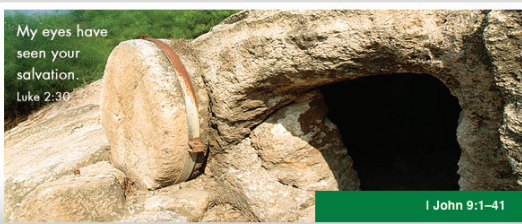
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Today's Devotion

Blind Of All Sorts—Their First Sight Is Of Him

Some American Christian leaders have gained notoriety for interpreting every global tragedy or disaster to a specific sin of the people affected. Scripture informs us that tragedy, sorrow, and disaster might have many causes, and it's often not obvious what that reason is. Certainly not every tragic event is a call to repentance. [▶](#)

This Month

An eyewitness account has power. Eyewitness testimony has more value than circumstantial evidence in a court of law. The accounts of survivors refute the tales of the Holocaust-deniers. Historians prize journals and diaries for their window on what life was like for the people who lived it. We can gain so much from looking at a story through the eyes of a witness. They add not only credibility. [▶](#)

Looking For More



This Month's Study at a Glance

A look at this month's devotions. [▶](#)



Today with Paul Nyquist

The Blind Will See [▶](#)



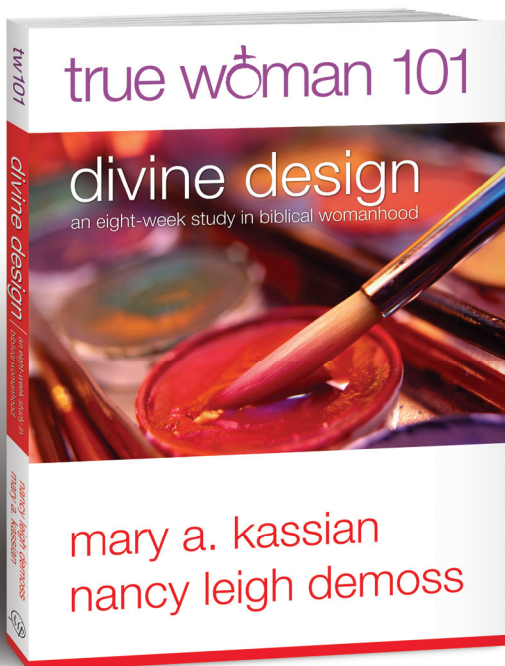
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