COUNTERCULTURAL

Leviticus 18 is all about upholding sexual integrity in a society overrun with sexual perversions. This chapter and the laws given within protect both women and children from sexual abuse. These laws expound on the seventh commandment: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod. 20:14). There are some today who pride themselves in not breaking this commandment since they have not cheated on their spouse, but this chapter expands the meaning of “adultery” to include a variety of perversions.

Before we look at some of the issues discussed in this chapter, let’s remember that God created sex, one of the most wonderful bonding experiences in life (Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:25). He deserves the credit and a generation of people who practice sexuality as He designed it.

In direct contrast to the beliefs and practices of Egypt and the land of Canaan (Lev. 18:3), biblical sexuality as defined in the Garden of Eden was to be covenantal, permanent, monogamous, heterosexual, and between two humans. (To learn more, check out the inVerse study titled Principles of Biblical Sexuality.) Because Israel had just come out of Egypt and were heading straight for the Promised Land in Canaan, God wanted to state clearly what was and what wasn’t proper sexual integrity.

Leviticus 18 and 20 are both relevant and countercultural still today. Our society encourages and celebrates sexual perversion, even using it for entertainment. Sexual sins cause much of the disease, heartbreak, crime, and other evils that plague us (1 Cor. 6:18). God calls us to the path that brings the most joy, peace, fulfillment, and health.
Write out 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite Leviticus 18 and 20 in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
FIVE REASONS

God provides five major reasons in Leviticus 18 for why we should choose sexual purity: First, because He says so! Four verses in the beginning of the chapter repeat the statement “I am the Lord” (vv. 2, 4–6), with verse 4 rather plainly saying we are to obey His laws because He is God. The Lord’s people are answerable to Him; they are under His authority and are therefore required to keep His laws. God is the one who defines purity, not us.

Second, living obediently to the Lord is good for us and brings joy into our lives, an idea that is expressed in verse 5: “If you obey my decrees and my regulations, you will find life through them. I am the Lord” (NLT). Notice that this verse is not simply a command, but a promise as well. God establishes clear sexual boundaries to protect the happiness of families and the human dignity of individuals. If sexually aberrant behavior were for our best development, God would never have prohibited them by name the way He did in Leviticus 18 and 20 and Matthew 5. God’s laws are not arbitrary. They are always for our health, wellness, and happiness.

Third, if we do not choose to be sexually pure, there will be severe consequences not only in this life but in the life to come (Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10). Sin is a severe and cruel debt collector! Like a predator, sin stalks us through sexual temptation, hoping to destroy our health, families, marriages, reputation, careers, and ministries (see 1 Pet. 5:8). Like an assassin, it seeks to slay us with guilt, regret, and condemnation, but—praise God!—we have Jesus, and the Bible promises that “He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

Fourth, God calls us to sexual pureness because He is holy—set apart from sin—and expects His people to be holy and set apart from the world as well (Lev. 19:2). The entire book of Leviticus has one primary value: holiness, in the food we eat, in our treatment of others, in how we approach God, in our sexuality. Christians abstain from divergent sexual practices because they know that they belong to God and that their sexual integrity will benefit not only them but society in general as well.

Finally, God wants us to live sexually pure lives to protect others. It is hard to imagine a more relevant chapter for people living in our day. Today’s news is filled with horrific stories of abuse, abandonment, neglect, and heartache. One consequence of our sexual sins against others is that it dishonors them. Other consequences that appear are jealousy, tension, and rivalry (Lev. 18). Like many Christians today, the Israelites lived between two sexually perverted cultures that openly or secretly embraced premarital sex, adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, pedophilia, and rape (vv. 3–23).

God is speaking through Moses in this chapter, so we know these instructions come backed by the highest Authority in the universe (vv. 1, 2). God is the authority behind these commands, not Hollywood, your culture, or even your church or pastor. In this countercultural chapter God clears the air regarding these things not only for Israel but for every nation and all humanity living today.
What should a Christian do if he or she has sexually impure desires? First, they must realize they are not alone in their struggle; sexual temptation is one of the biggest temptations humans this side of eternity will face. Second, nowhere in the Bible is a person condemned for being tempted—it is only in acting on the temptation that sin takes place. Third, the victory is won or lost in the mind. The Bible says to take “every thought into captivity” and make it obedient to Jesus (2 Cor. 10:5). When we allow ourselves to dwell on impure thoughts, watch movies or listen to songs that have sexual themes, or engage with sexual content online, we are weakening ourselves and giving sexual sin greater power over our lives.

Fourth, they should surround themselves with others who can encourage them in their decision to live fully for the Lord regarding their sexuality. Be careful about organizations in the community, school, or even church that subtly or even openly promote sexual deviations from God’s Word. In Romans 1:32 God warns not only those who engage in these lifestyles but also those who watch approvingly from a distance. Of course, “from a distance” could include listening to their lyrics, joining their culture, or keeping company with them as they engage in those things.

Fifth, do not be surprised that living a sexually pure life inevitably involves struggle. Dying to self so that we can live for Christ is a workout! It requires much prayer, Bible study, self-control, and even strategic planning (e.g., getting to bed early, avoiding certain places, guarding our entertainment choices, installing safeguards). But never forget this: as Christians, we fight from victory, not for victory. In Jesus we have already won, so walk like a winner—walk like a soldier who has already defeated his enemy!

Sixth, use the Bible like a sword, for that is what it’s called in Ephesians 6:17: “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (emphasis added). Interestingly, the Greek word for “word” is rhema, which means the spoken Word of God. Like Jesus when He faced Satan’s temptations in the wilderness, we must speak out loud the promises of God when we are faced with temptation (Matt. 4).

Seventh, expect God to do a miracle, for He promises to in 1 Corinthians 6:11. Though some people may have been born with a propensity toward a particular sexual sin, been sexually abused and led into sin, or gotten themselves enslaved to a particular sin by engaging in it, Jesus still does miracles today. We shouldn’t be afraid to ask Him for one—to ask Him to help us desire sexual pureness and live in such a way that honors Him and brings us freedom from fear and guilt. He will do it. God may show us other steps to take in the journey, but just know that our failings on the straight and narrow are failings forward, not backward. Don’t be discouraged. God will not abandon His faithful warriors, especially when they stumble in the fight.
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

1 Thessalonians 4:3–7
Genesis 39
Deuteronomy 22:25–29
Ephesians 4:17–19
1 Corinthians 5:9–11
2 Peter 1:4
1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 5:1–8
2 Corinthians 2:6–8

What other narratives come to mind in connection with Leviticus 18; 20?

Review your memorized verse from Leviticus 18; 20.
Where’s Jesus in this week’s study of Leviticus 18? Jesus is the source of life, and when we obey Him, we experience that life flowing through us. Some wonder if Leviticus is a legalistic book, or, to put it differently, if life is given conditionally based on obedience. The Bible teaches that life, joy, and fulfillment here on earth are often dependent on obeying God (Deut. 6:2; 8:2, 3; 30:12), but life in the world to come (meaning immortality) is dependent entirely on repentance and faith in Christ (Acts 20:12; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12). Salvation is possible only through the good works that Jesus did on our behalf. Only by His blood, sweat, and tears can we gain forgiveness for our sins and assurance of salvation and right standing with God. We are not saved by being sexually pure or by keeping any of the other commandments either. No matter what superficial categories may divide us, we are all in the same category of depending completely on the grace of Christ for salvation.

One of the most amazing discoveries to make in Scripture is the truth that when we experience the unconditional kindness of God, called grace, we are supernaturally empowered to overcome any sin, obstacle, or challenge in our lives (Rom. 6:14; Titus 2:11–13). The grace displayed on Calvary moves us not only to renounce sin but also to live holy and committed lives for God.

Perhaps you remember the story of the adulterous woman in John 8, whom the religious leaders caught sleeping with someone else’s husband. She was then dragged out in public and condemned for adultery. There are a lot of unknowns in this story, such as where the man she was sleeping with was for the trial, but you may remember that they brought her to Jesus, no doubt because this whole thing was a setup to trap Him in His words and have Him killed. Instead of falling into the trap, Jesus knelt and wrote the accusers’ sins in the dirt for all to see. One by one, the church leaders made a rather hasty exit. After a short exchange with the woman, Jesus said some of the most powerful words ever addressed to someone whose sexual life is impure but who wants to live a pure and holy life for God: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (v. 11). Notice that Jesus did not reverse the order, as many do today; He did not tell her to stop sinning before offering her forgiveness. He gave her grace first, and then, from a position of forgiveness, love, and right standing with God, commanded her to sin no more. Wow! Can you see how grace can give a person victory over any sin? Jesus says the same thing to us right now. “Sister, Brother, neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we made this our strategy for helping those within our churches and communities who struggle with various sexual sins? What if, like Jesus, we too were filled with grace and truth and not only loved them unconditionally but also told them the truth about both the danger of their sins and God’s command to live in freedom?
THE PURENESS OF THE SAVIOR

“There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such I would say, Do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God. No; Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, ’These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’ 1 John 2:1, KJV. And do not forget the words of Christ, ‘The Father Himself loveth you.’ John 16:27, KJV. He desires to restore you to Himself, to see His own purity and holiness reflected in you. And if you will but yield yourself to Him, He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it forward to the day of Jesus Christ. Pray more fervently; believe more fully. As we come to distrust our own power, let us trust the power of our Redeemer, and we shall praise Him who is the health of our countenance.

“The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan's delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you.

“No deep-seated love for Jesus can dwell in the heart that does not realize its own sinfulness. The soul that is transformed by the grace of Christ will admire His divine character; but if we do not see our own moral deformity, it is unmistakable evidence that we have not had a view of the beauty and excellence of Christ.

“The less we see to esteem in ourselves, the more we shall see to esteem in the infinite purity and loveliness of our Saviour. A view of our sinfulness drives us to Him who can pardon; and when the soul, realizing its helplessness, reaches out after Christ, He will reveal Himself in power. The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the Word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image” (Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956], pp. 64, 65).

“It is not Christ’s follower that, with averted eyes, turns from the erring, leaving them unhindered to pursue their downward course. Those who are forward in accusing others, and zealous in bringing them to justice, are often in their own lives more guilty than they. Men hate the sinner, while they love the sin. Christ hates the sin, but loves the sinner. This will be the spirit of all who follow Him. Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein” (The Desire of Ages [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940], p. 462).
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What do Leviticus 18 and 20 tell you about God and His care for your sexuality?

Why did God highlight so many misuses of sexuality? Whom is He protecting?

How is this chapter countercultural to us today? What does this mean for the church in the long run?

How can a young person overcome sexual temptation?

What responsibility do we have to protect others from sexual abuse?

How did Jesus minister to people who struggled with sexual sins and lifestyles?

How can we help each other live sexually pure lives in this world?

If a friend of yours was struggling with God’s condemnation of certain lifestyle in Leviticus 18, what questions might he or she have and how would you answer them?