

The Book of Leviticus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: The Sanctity of Blood and Holy Living

Leviticus 17:1–18:30

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Two things are doctrinally at stake in this lesson. First, the meaning of blood. Leviticus 17:11 is the key that unlocks the whole sacrificial system and the cross beyond it: the life is in the blood, and it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. The aim is to help students see why atonement requires blood, why God reserved the blood for Himself, and how this principle reaches its fulfillment in the precious blood of Christ, by which we are redeemed and forgiven (Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 1:18–19; Ephesians 1:7). This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson and Q9 should carry it with full weight.

Second, the abiding moral truth of God's design for sexuality and marriage. Chapter 18 must be taught with measured biblical clarity, neither softened into vagueness nor sharpened into harshness. The teacher should distinguish carefully between two things: the abiding moral truths of God's created design (the one-flesh union of one man and one woman, and the prohibition of incest, adultery, homosexual acts, child sacrifice, and bestiality), which the New Testament reaffirms (Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Hebrews 13:4), and the civil penalties of Israel's national law, which were never binding on Christians and have not been carried into the New Covenant. The Old Law itself has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17), yet its moral revelation of God's unchanging character still instructs us (Romans 15:4).

For the student's spiritual formation, the goal is truth held with grace. We want students who will not be ashamed of God's moral design, who can speak it with conviction, and who will also speak it with compassion, remembering that the gospel's word to every sinner, including those who have sinned sexually, is hope: and such were some of you, but you are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11). The lesson should leave students both more committed to personal holiness and more tender toward those who need the cleansing only Christ's blood can give.

Question 1

Student Question:

Why did God forbid Israel from offering sacrifices anywhere they pleased and require all sacrifices to be brought to the door of the tabernacle (17:1–9)? What did this teach about acceptable worship being on God's terms rather than ours?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 17 opens by drawing a tight circle around Israel's worship. Any man who killed an ox, lamb, or goat as a sacrifice, whether in the camp or outside it, and did not bring it to the door of the tabernacle to offer it to the Lord, was to be cut off from his people (17:1-4). God adds the reason: that Israel would no longer offer their sacrifices to the goat idols after whom they had played the harlot (17:7). In the surrounding nations, people sacrificed wherever they wished, to whatever gods they pleased. God says, not so among you.

The principle is acceptable worship on God's terms. Israel did not get to invent its own forms of worship or scatter its sacrifices across the hilltops like the pagans. There was one place, one altar, one prescribed way, because worship is not about what pleases us but about coming to God as He has appointed. To worship God your own way is, in the end, to worship a god of your own making.

This guards against a deep temptation in the human heart, the urge to approach God on our own terms. From Cain's rejected offering to Nadab and Abihu's strange fire, Scripture repeatedly shows that God cares not only that we worship but how. Sincerity is not enough if it is sincerity in something God never authorized. The pagan worshiped earnestly at his high places, yet his worship was an abomination.

Under the New Covenant we are not bound to a single tabernacle, for Jesus told the woman at the well that the hour had come when true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Yet the underlying principle endures: worship is to be in truth, according to God's revealed will, not according to our own preference. The freedom of the gospel is not freedom to reinvent worship but freedom to worship the living God as He has shown us in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship must be offered on God's terms, not according to human preference (Leviticus 17:1-9; John 4:23-24).
- Centralizing sacrifice at the tabernacle guarded Israel from idolatry and self-styled worship.
- Sincerity alone does not make worship acceptable; it must be according to God's revealed will.
- The principle of worshiping in spirit and in truth carries into the New Covenant, though the single physical location does not.
- Self-chosen worship is a recurring danger from Cain to Nadab and Abihu to the high places of the pagans.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God care not only that we worship but how we worship?
- How does the principle of acceptable worship apply to the church today?
- Where do we see the temptation to worship God on our own terms rather than His?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to worship God on your own terms rather than His, choosing what feels meaningful to you over what He has actually authorized? How do you discern the difference?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the principle of acceptable worship onto our own practice. It is easy to drift from worshiping God as He directs to worshiping in whatever way feels meaningful to us. The line can be subtle. We can begin to measure worship by how it moves us rather than by whether it honors God as He has asked to be honored.

The heart of the issue is authority. Do we come to worship asking what God has revealed, or do we come asking what we prefer? A worship life governed by personal taste will always tend to drift toward self. A worship life governed by God's Word stays anchored, even when our feelings rise and fall.

Discernment here means going back to Scripture rather than to our instincts. We ask what God has shown us about how He is to be approached and honored, and we conform our practice to that. This is not cold legalism; it is love that wants to please the One we worship rather than merely please ourselves.

Examine your own worship. Do you come to give God what He desires, or chiefly to get an experience for yourself? The two are not always opposed, but when they conflict, the worshiper after God's heart chooses to honor God His way. That is the difference between worship that pleases God and worship that merely pleases us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship can subtly drift from honoring God to pleasing self.
- The question of worship is ultimately a question of authority: God's Word or our preference.
- Discernment comes from returning to Scripture, not following instinct or emotion alone.
- Loving God means wanting to please Him on His terms, not merely satisfy ourselves.

Discussion Prompts

- How can we tell when our worship has drifted toward pleasing ourselves?
- What role should Scripture play in shaping how we worship?
- How do you keep your worship centered on God rather than on your own experience?

Question 3

Student Question:

Why was the eating of blood so strictly forbidden (17:10–14), and what reason does God give in verse 11 about the life being in the blood? What does this reverence for blood teach about the seriousness of life and atonement?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now comes one of the great verses of the Bible. God forbids Israel to eat blood, of any kind, with striking severity: whoever eats any blood will be cut off from his people (17:10, 14). And He gives the reason in verse 11, a sentence worth memorizing: For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul.

Three truths are packed into that verse. First, life is in the blood. Blood represents life itself, and life is sacred because it comes from God. Second, God gave the blood for the altar, that is, He appointed blood as the means of atonement. Third, it is the blood that makes atonement, life given for life. The reason blood was not to be eaten is that it was holy; it belonged on the altar as the appointed price of sin, not on the table as common food.

This is why Scripture can later declare that without shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22). Atonement is not a matter of mere ritual or sentiment. Sin is a debt of life, and only life given can answer for it. The blood reserved on the altar was a perpetual lesson that forgiveness is costly, that sin reaches down to the level of life and death, and that God Himself provides the substitute whose life answers for ours.

So the prohibition on eating blood was not mere dietary law; it was theology written into the body's most basic act. Every meal reminded Israel that life belongs to God and that atonement comes by blood. We are not under the dietary command (Acts 10; Colossians 2:16), yet the truth it taught stands forever and finds its fulfillment at Calvary, where the blood that makes atonement was at last poured out in full.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Leviticus 17:11 is the theological key to the whole sacrificial system: it is the blood that makes atonement.
- Blood represents life, which is sacred because it belongs to God.
- Atonement requires the giving of life; without shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22).
- The prohibition against eating blood reserved it as holy, for the altar, not the table.
- The dietary command is not binding on Christians (Acts 10; Colossians 2:16), but the truth about blood and atonement is eternal.

Discussion Prompts

- What three truths about blood and atonement are packed into Leviticus 17:11?
- Why does atonement require the giving of life?

- How does the reverence for blood in Leviticus prepare us for the cross?

Question 4

Student Question:

How does knowing that life itself belongs to God, symbolized in His claim on the blood, shape the way you value your own life and the lives of others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

If life belongs to God, then how we regard life is a spiritual matter. God's claim on the blood was His claim on life itself. He is the giver and owner of every life, and that conviction shapes how we value our own lives and the lives of others.

When we forget that life belongs to God, we begin to treat it cheaply, our own through carelessness or self-destruction, and others' through indifference, contempt, or worse. But when we remember that every life is God's gift and God's possession, we hold life with reverence. We guard our own as a stewardship, and we honor others as image-bearers of God.

This conviction stands behind the church's care for the vulnerable, the unborn, the elderly, the poor, the stranger. If life is God's, then no life is disposable. The same God who reserved the blood for Himself made every human being in His image, and that gives every person a dignity the world cannot take away.

Consider how you regard your own life. Do you treat it as a sacred trust from God, to be stewarded for His purposes, or do you treat it carelessly? And how do you regard the lives around you, especially those the world counts as inconvenient or unimportant? To value life as God does is one quiet but profound mark of holiness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Life belongs to God, which gives every human life sacred dignity (Genesis 1:27; Acts 17:25).
- Forgetting that life is God's leads to treating it cheaply, in ourselves and in others.
- Reverence for life undergirds care for the vulnerable, the unborn, the poor, and the stranger.
- Stewarding our own life and honoring others' lives is a quiet mark of holiness.

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing life belongs to God change the way you value your own life?
- How should reverence for life shape the way we treat the vulnerable?
- Where might you be treating your own life or another's life carelessly?

Question 5

Student Question:

In chapter 18, God grounds His moral commands by repeatedly saying I am the LORD your God (18:2-5). Why does God anchor moral standards in who He is rather than in human opinion or culture? What changes when morality is rooted in God's character?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 18 opens not with a rule but with a Person. Before God gives a single command about sexuality, He says, I am the LORD your God. After the manner of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and after the manner of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, you shall not do (18:2-3). Then through the chapter, like a refrain, He keeps saying, I am the LORD. The commands are anchored in His character.

This matters enormously. God does not ground morality in human opinion, cultural custom, or majority vote. He grounds it in Himself, in who He is. The reason these things are right and those things are wrong is not that society decided so, but that the holy God who made us declared so. Morality is rooted in the unchanging character of God, not in the shifting sands of culture.

Egypt behind them and Canaan before them both represent cultures with their own moral codes, codes God flatly rejects. Israel was not to take its cues from the place it came from or the place it was going, but from the Lord who redeemed it. That is a piercing word for every generation, because the surrounding culture always has its own confident morality, and it always presents itself as obvious and enlightened.

When morality is rooted in God's character, it has a stability the world cannot offer. Cultures change, opinions swing, what one decade celebrates the next may regret. But God does not change, and neither does His moral will. To say I am the LORD your God before giving moral commands is to say: these are not negotiable preferences but the design of the One who made you and owns you. That is both humbling and deeply freeing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God grounds morality in His own character, not in human opinion or culture (Leviticus 18:2-5).
- The refrain I am the LORD anchors every command in God's unchanging nature.
- Israel was not to take moral cues from Egypt behind or Canaan ahead, but from the Lord.
- Morality rooted in God's character has a stability that cultural morality cannot offer.
- Every culture presents its own morality as obvious; God calls His people to a higher authority.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God anchor His moral commands in who He is rather than in human reasoning?
- What changes when we see morality as rooted in God's unchanging character?

- How do Egypt and Canaan picture the cultural pressures we face today?

Question 6

Student Question:

We live in a culture that often says each person should define right and wrong for themselves. How do you personally resist the pull to let the surrounding culture, rather than God's Word, define what is good?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Our culture has largely embraced the idea that each person defines right and wrong for themselves, that truth is personal and morality is private. It sounds tolerant and humble, but it leaves us with no solid ground beneath our feet, only the endlessly shifting preferences of individuals and crowds. Against this, the believer holds that there is a moral law because there is a moral Lawgiver.

Resisting the cultural pull begins with knowing where authority lies. If God's Word defines good and evil, then our task is not to invent morality but to receive it. This frees us from the exhausting and impossible job of being our own moral authority, and it anchors us when the cultural winds blow hard, as they always do.

Practically, this means we must saturate ourselves in Scripture, because the culture's voice is loud and constant. We hear its assumptions on every screen and in every conversation, and if we do not deliberately let God's Word shape our thinking, the culture will shape it for us by sheer repetition. We resist not by arrogance but by conviction quietly rooted in what God has said.

It also means we must be willing to be out of step. The believer who lets God define right and wrong will sometimes hold positions the surrounding world finds strange or even offensive. That is not new; Israel faced it between Egypt and Canaan, and the early Christians faced it in pagan Rome. Faithfulness has often meant being a holy minority. The question is simply whether God or the culture will be our authority.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cultural claim that each person defines right and wrong leaves no stable moral ground.
- There is a moral law because there is a moral Lawgiver.
- Resisting cultural pressure requires saturating ourselves in God's Word (Romans 12:2).
- Faithfulness sometimes means being out of step with the surrounding culture, as Israel and the early church were.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the idea that everyone defines their own truth break down under examination?

- What practical habits help you let Scripture, not culture, shape your sense of right and wrong?
- When have you had to stand apart from the culture to be faithful to God?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read God's design for marriage and sexuality in chapter 18, where He forbids incest, adultery, child sacrifice to Molech, homosexual acts, and bestiality. What positive design for human sexuality and marriage is God protecting, and how does the New Testament reaffirm these same moral truths (Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Hebrews 13:4)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We come now to the moral content of chapter 18, and we walk it with both clarity and compassion. God forbids a series of sexual sins: incest in its various forms (18:6–18), adultery (18:20), the sacrifice of children to the god Molech (18:21), homosexual acts (18:22), and bestiality (18:23). These are described as abominations and as the very things that defiled the nations God was casting out of the land. The list is sobering and plain.

But notice what God is protecting. Behind every prohibition stands a positive design. God created human sexuality as a good gift, to be expressed within the lifelong, one-flesh union of one man and one woman in marriage, the design He set down at creation when He made them male and female and said the two shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Chapter 18 is the fence around that garden. Each forbidden thing is a violation of the marriage union God designed, whether by crossing family boundaries, betraying a spouse, sacrificing children, or departing from the male-and-female pattern of marriage itself.

We must be honest that these are abiding moral truths, not merely the customs of an ancient people. The New Testament reaffirms them. Paul describes the abandonment of the natural use of male and female as contrary to God's design (Romans 1:26–27). He lists sexual sins among those whose practice, unrepented, bars one from the kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9–10). And the writer of Hebrews says marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (Hebrews 13:4). The moral standard God revealed in Leviticus 18 He upholds still.

At the same time, we must be clear about what does not carry over. Israel's national law attached civil penalties to these sins, penalties for a particular nation under a particular covenant. Those civil penalties are not binding on Christians and were never meant to be. The Old Law itself has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17). What endures is the moral truth, God's unchanging design, not the civil enforcement of ancient Israel. So we hold the moral standard firmly while leaving Israel's penal code in its own covenant.

And we hold it with compassion. The aim is never harshness or contempt, but truth offered in love. Every one of us comes to God as a sinner needing cleansing, and the gospel's word about sexual sin, as about every sin, is hope. Paul, after listing these very sins, adds: and such were some of you, but you are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:11). That is how we teach chapter 18, with the clarity of God's design and the open door of God's grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God protects a positive design: sexuality within the lifelong one-flesh union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24).
- The prohibitions of incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexual acts, and bestiality each violate God's marriage design.
- These are abiding moral truths reaffirmed in the New Testament (Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Hebrews 13:4).
- Israel's civil penalties for these sins are not binding on Christians; the Old Law has been fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17).
- The moral standard endures even though the civil enforcement of ancient Israel does not.
- Truth must be held with compassion; the gospel offers cleansing and hope to all who have sinned (1 Corinthians 6:11).
- We teach God's design with conviction and grace, never with harshness or contempt.

Discussion Prompts

- What positive design for marriage and sexuality is God protecting in chapter 18?
- How do we distinguish the abiding moral truths from Israel's civil penalties?
- How can we speak God's truth about sexuality with both clarity and compassion?

Question 8

Student Question:

God warns that these sins defile not only the individual but the land itself (18:24–28). How seriously do you take the way your private moral choices affect your family, your church, and your community?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God ends the chapter with a striking warning: the nations defiled themselves with these things, and the land itself was defiled, so that the land vomited out its inhabitants (18:24–28). Sin is never merely private. The choices made in the secret places of a culture rise up to defile the whole land. What individuals do in their homes shapes the moral climate of a whole people.

This cuts against the modern instinct that says what I do in private affects no one but myself. Scripture insists otherwise. Our private moral choices ripple outward, into our families first, then

into our communities and even our nations. A man's secret sin wounds his marriage and his children. A culture's accepted sins shape the world the next generation will inherit. Holiness and corruption are both contagious.

For the believer, this is sobering and motivating. It means our pursuit of personal purity is not a private hobby; it is part of how we bless or curse the people around us. The church is meant to be a holy people whose lives raise rather than lower the moral atmosphere, salt that preserves and light that shows the way (Matthew 5:13–16). Our purity matters to more people than we know.

It also calls us to take seriously the influence of our example. Children watch their parents, younger Christians watch older ones, the world watches the church. The private choices we think are hidden are quietly forming the moral world others live in. To pursue holiness is, in part, an act of love toward our families and communities, sparing them the defilement that sin always spreads.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin is never merely private; it defiles families, communities, and nations (Leviticus 18:24–28).
- Private moral choices ripple outward and shape the moral climate of a people.
- Personal holiness is part of how the church blesses the world as salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16).
- Our example silently forms the moral world our children and others inherit.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it a mistake to think our private moral choices affect no one else?
- How do our private choices shape our families and communities for good or ill?
- How does seeing sin's wider effect motivate you toward personal holiness?

Question 9

Student Question:

Leviticus 17:11 says it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul. Trace this principle from the altar of Leviticus to the cross of Christ (Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter 1:18–19; Ephesians 1:7). Why must atonement come through blood, and how does the blood of Christ accomplish fully and forever what the blood of animals could only picture? Address what this means for our cleansing and our hope, including the hope held out to all who have sinned sexually (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now we draw the great line from the altar of Leviticus to the cross of Christ. Leviticus 17:11 declared it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul. The whole sacrificial system rested on that truth: sin is a matter of life and death, and only the giving of life can answer for it. The New Testament takes this principle and announces its fulfillment: without shedding of blood there is no remission (Hebrews 9:22), and the blood that finally accomplishes what no animal's blood ever could is the precious blood of Christ.

Why must atonement come through blood at all? Because sin is not a trivial debt that can be waved away. Sin is rebellion against the holy God, and its wage is death (Romans 6:23). Justice cannot simply ignore it. For sin to be forgiven without injustice, the penalty of life must be paid, and God in His mercy provided that the life of a substitute could answer for the sinner. The blood on the altar was that substitute's life, given in the sinner's place. Every sacrifice in Leviticus preached this in advance.

But the blood of bulls and goats could never actually take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). It could only cover, only picture, only point forward. It had to be repeated endlessly because it never reached the root of the problem. The animal was a stand-in until the true Substitute came. When John saw Jesus he cried, Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), and at last the reality had come.

The blood of Christ accomplishes fully and forever what animal blood only pictured. Peter says we were redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18–19). Paul says in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7). His blood does not merely cover sin for a year; it cleanses the conscience and obtains eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12, 14). What Leviticus 17:11 announced in shadow, Calvary fulfilled in substance.

And here is the hope that crowns this lesson, a hope held out even to those who have sinned grievously, including sexually. After listing sexual sins and others in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says, and such were some of you, but you are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11). The blood that makes atonement for the soul can cleanse any soul that comes to Christ in faith and obedience. No sin is too deep for it, no past too stained. That is the gospel hidden in Leviticus 17:11 and revealed in full at the cross: it is the blood, now the blood of Christ, that makes atonement for the soul.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Leviticus 17:11 establishes that atonement comes through blood, fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 9:22).
- Atonement requires blood because sin is rebellion whose wage is death; a substitute's life answers for the sinner.
- Animal blood could only cover and picture; it could never take away sin (Hebrews 10:4).
- Christ's blood accomplishes full and eternal redemption (1 Peter 1:18–19; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:12–14).

- The blood of Christ cleanses the conscience, not merely covering sin for a season.
- The gospel offers cleansing and hope to every sinner, including those who have sinned sexually (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Discussion Prompts

- Why must atonement come through the shedding of blood?
- How does the blood of Christ accomplish what animal sacrifices could not?
- What hope does Leviticus 17:11, fulfilled at the cross, hold out to those weighed down by past sin?

Question 10

Student Question:

Chapter 18 ends with a call to keep God's statutes and not defile yourselves (18:30). Where is God calling you to holiness in the area of your body, your relationships, or your purity, and what one step of obedience will you take?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 18 closes with a charge: Therefore you shall keep my ordinance, that you commit not any one of these abominable customs, and that you defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God (18:30). The call is to holiness in the most personal areas of life, the body, the relationships, the purity that God claims as His own.

This is where the lesson lands on us personally. It is one thing to affirm God's design in the abstract and quite another to submit our own bodies and relationships to it. Holiness in the area of sexuality and purity is not automatic; it requires deliberate choices, guarded eyes, faithful commitments, and sometimes hard repentance. God calls every believer to keep his ordinance here, not merely admire it.

For some this means guarding purity in singleness, refusing what the culture treats as ordinary. For some it means faithfulness in marriage, keeping the bed undefiled, fleeing even the early steps toward unfaithfulness. For some it means turning from a pattern of sin and trusting the cleansing of Christ to make a new start. The call is the same for all: do not defile yourselves, but keep yourselves for the holy God who claims you.

And the call comes with grace. We do not pursue this holiness in our own strength or to earn God's favor, but as those already washed and redeemed by the blood of Christ, living out the holiness He has given us. The God who provided the atonement now calls us to live worthy of it. What one concrete step of obedience is He pressing on you in this area? Name it, and take it, trusting the Lord who is holy to make you holy too.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God calls every believer to personal holiness in body, relationships, and purity (Leviticus 18:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–7).
- Holiness in sexuality requires deliberate choices, not passive good intentions.
- The call applies in singleness and in marriage, and includes repentance and a fresh start where needed.
- We pursue holiness not to earn favor but as those already redeemed by Christ's blood.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God calling you to holiness in the area of your body or relationships?
- What deliberate steps protect purity in singleness or faithfulness in marriage?
- How does being already redeemed by Christ shape the way you pursue holiness?