

The Book of Leviticus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Rules for Priests and Acceptable Offerings

Leviticus 21:1–22:33

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, these chapters press the holiness of God and the fittingness of those who approach Him. The lesson must hold two truths together. First, the Aaronic priesthood and its physical requirements were genuine commands under the Old Law, real shadows pointing to a real substance, now fulfilled and removed in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 7–10). We do not bind a priestly caste, ceremonial purity rules, or physical qualifications on anyone today. Second, the principle these shadows carried, that the holy God deserves holy servants and unblemished gifts, is permanent. Guard against two errors: making these laws a checklist for Christians, and dismissing them as irrelevant antiquities. They are Scripture written for our instruction (Romans 15:4), and their fulfillment in Christ is the heart of the gospel.

Christ is the gravitational center here. He is the great High Priest, holy and undefiled, who needs no successor and offers no repeated sacrifice (Hebrews 7:26–28). He is also the spotless Lamb, offered without blemish to God (1 Peter 1:19; Hebrews 9:14). In Him the servant and the sacrifice are one and both are flawless. This is why our access to God rests not on our perfection but on His. At the same time, every Christian now shares in a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5,9), called to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For spiritual formation, drive the lesson toward wholehearted worship and the costliness of giving God our best. Malachi 1 and Romans 12:1 are the bridge from altar to life. The student should leave examining where he offers God the blemished and the leftover, in worship attendance, in giving, in service, in the quality of his attention, and resolving instead to present his body a living sacrifice. The aim is not guilt but glad surrender to a holy God who first gave His best for us.

Question 1

Student Question:

Why did God require the priests, and especially the high priest, to keep themselves from defilement and to be without physical blemish in order to serve at the altar? What does this teach about the holiness that fits those who draw near to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Leviticus 21 turns from the holiness of the people in general to the holiness of those who lead Israel in worship. The priests of Aaron's line stood at the meeting point between a holy God and a sinful nation. Because of that office, God placed heavier restrictions on them than on ordinary

Israelites. An ordinary man could mourn and touch the dead of his household; the priest was limited, and the high priest was forbidden even to defile himself for his own father or mother (21:11). The nearer a man stood to the altar, the more carefully he had to guard his holiness.

The reason given is striking and repeated: 'for the bread of their God, they do offer; therefore they shall be holy' (21:6). Holiness here is not a reward the priest earns but a condition that fits his calling. He handles the sacred. He represents the people before God and God before the people. A careless, defiled mediator would dishonor the One he served and endanger those he represented. The office demanded a life that matched its weight.

The requirement of physical wholeness (21:16–23) can trouble modern readers, so it must be handled with care. God was not declaring that disabled persons were morally inferior or unloved; the blemished priest still ate of the holy bread (21:22). The point was symbolic and pedagogical. At the altar, where everything pictured perfection and wholeness, the visible imperfection of the officiant would blur the lesson God was teaching. The physical 'without blemish' of the priest pictured a deeper, moral and spiritual wholeness that God was driving toward.

This is shadow, not substance. The whole arrangement was designed to teach Israel, and us, that the holy God is approached only by what is fitting for His holiness. It built into the nation's life a daily, visible vocabulary of holiness, perfection, and separation, so that when the true Priest arrived, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:26), Israel would have eyes to recognize Him.

For us the application is not ceremonial but moral. The God who insisted that those who handle holy things be holy has not changed. Those who lead and serve in His worship today are called to lives that match the sacredness of what they handle, not for show, but because holiness fits the presence of a holy God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holiness is fitting for those who draw near to God; the office shapes the obligation.
- The physical blemish laws were symbolic and pedagogical, not a verdict on the worth of disabled persons (the blemished priest still ate the holy bread, 21:22).
- These were genuine Old Law commands, now fulfilled and removed in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17), not binding on Christians.
- The shadow taught Israel a vocabulary of holiness and wholeness that prepared them to recognize the true Priest.
- Avoid any suggestion that physical condition determines spiritual standing; the lesson is about wholehearted holiness.

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think God placed heavier holiness requirements on the priests, and the heaviest on the high priest?
- How can we honor the symbolic meaning of the 'without blemish' requirement without misreading it as God devaluing the disabled?
- In what sense does this passage still speak to those who lead God's people in worship today?

Question 2

Student Question:

When you serve God (in worship, teaching, hospitality, or any ministry), do you prepare your heart, or do you come carelessly? What would taking your service to God more seriously look like for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Leviticus draws a tight line between the servant and the service. The priest could not approach the altar carelessly; he prepared, he guarded his condition, he treated the holy as holy. Behind the ceremony is a question that lands on every one of us: when I come to serve God, do I prepare, or do I just show up?

It is easy to let service to God become routine. We can teach a class with notes we never reviewed, sing without thinking, lead a prayer while our heart is somewhere else, serve at the Lord's table while distracted. None of that is forbidden the way the priestly defilements were, but the underlying issue is the same. Carelessness toward holy things reveals how lightly we are holding the holiness of God.

Preparation of heart is not about perfection or scrupulous anxiety. It is about reverence. It is pausing before worship to remember whom we are about to address. It is praying before we serve. It is bringing our attention, not just our attendance. The priest's careful holiness was meant to keep him aware that he was handling the things of God; our preparation does the same for us.

This question asks the student to look honestly at his own habits of service and worship. The goal is not guilt but renewed reverence, a fresh sense that serving God is a sacred privilege worth preparing for.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Carelessness in service reveals how lightly we hold God's holiness.
- Preparation of heart is about reverence, not scrupulosity or earning favor.
- Routine can drain the awareness that we are handling holy things.
- Reverent preparation brings our attention and not merely our attendance.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it look like, practically, to prepare your heart before worship or service?
- Where has routine dulled your sense that serving God is sacred?
- What is one habit you could add this week to serve God more reverently?

Question 3

Student Question:

Leviticus 22 insists that the offering brought to God be without blemish and 'accepted for you.' What does the demand for an unblemished, acceptable offering reveal about how God receives our worship and gifts?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 22 turns from the holiness of the priest to the holiness of the offering. Verses 17–25 lay down the rule plainly: the animal offered must be 'without blemish' and therefore 'accepted for you' (22:20–21). A creature that was blind, broken, maimed, or diseased was rejected. God would not receive a defective gift, and the text ties acceptance directly to the quality of what was brought.

This reveals something profound about how God receives worship. He is not flattered by mere activity at the altar. The act of bringing a sacrifice was not enough; the gift had to be fitting. To bring God the defective and the worthless was not worship at all but insult dressed up as devotion. Worship that costs the worshiper nothing, or that gives God what we would have discarded anyway, fails to honor Him.

The phrase 'accepted for you' matters. The acceptability of the worshiper was bound up with the acceptability of the offering. This points beyond itself. No animal could finally make a sinner acceptable to God; the whole system was a tutor pointing forward (Galatians 3:24). The unblemished requirement trained Israel to expect a perfect offering, one truly without blemish, that would make worshipers acceptable once and for all.

We must not flatten this into a transaction where the right gift buys God's favor. Rather, the unblemished offering expresses a heart that holds God in high honor. A worshiper who brings his best is saying with his actions, 'You are worthy of my finest.' A worshiper who brings the blemished is saying the opposite, whatever his words claim.

For us this means God still weighs the heart behind the gift. Under the New Covenant we do not bring animals, but we do bring worship, giving, service, and our very selves. The question Leviticus 22 presses is whether what we bring reflects a true estimate of God's worth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God ties acceptance to the quality of the offering; mere activity at the altar is not enough.

- A blemished gift is insult disguised as devotion.
- 'Accepted for you' links the worshiper's standing to the offering, pointing forward to the perfect offering.
- This is not a transaction buying favor but an expression of how highly we honor God.
- The principle endures: God weighs the heart behind what we bring.

Discussion Prompts

- What does 'accepted for you' tell us about the relationship between the gift and the worshiper?
- How is bringing a blemished offering an insult rather than mere imperfection?
- How does this principle carry over into the worship and giving of God's people today?

Question 4

Student Question:

Have you ever caught yourself giving God a 'blemished' gift, the cheap, the convenient, the easy? What did that reveal about how you were really viewing God at that moment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

It is uncomfortable to admit, but most of us have at some point handed God a blemished gift. We have given Him the dollars left after everything else was spent, the prayer squeezed into the last drowsy minute of the day, the service we volunteered for and then resented. The animal on the altar may be gone, but the human tendency to give God our leftovers is very much alive.

What makes this question searching is that the blemished gift always reveals something about our heart at that moment. When we give God the cheap and the convenient, we are quietly treating Him as less worthy than the other claims on our resources. We would not hand a respected guest a half-eaten meal; that we do it to God exposes a gap between our stated reverence and our real valuation of Him.

The honest path is not self-condemnation but recognition. Naming the blemished gift, and the attitude behind it, is the first step toward bringing God our best. Often the issue is not that we lack the resource but that we have not decided He gets first claim on it. The unblemished offering begins with a settled conviction that God is worthy of our finest.

This question invites a specific, honest memory rather than a general confession. Identifying one concrete instance helps the student see the pattern and, more importantly, see the heart attitude God is inviting him to change.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Blemished gifts (leftover time, money, energy) reveal our real valuation of God.
- We instinctively give our best to those we honor most; God deserves no less.

- The remedy is recognition and a settled decision that God gets first claim.
- Honest naming of a specific instance breaks the pattern better than vague confession.

Discussion Prompts

- Recall one specific time you gave God a 'blemished' gift. What were you feeling toward God then?
- What does the leftover gift reveal about where God ranks among your priorities?
- What would it take to give God the first and best rather than the last and least?

Question 5

Student Question:

How do these chapters present the priesthood and the sacrifice as a shadow of something greater? In what ways does the requirement of holiness and an unblemished offering point us forward?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

These chapters are not merely rules; they are a tutor. The careful design of priest and sacrifice was meant to lift Israel's eyes toward something the system itself could never deliver. The repeated insistence on 'without blemish' for both the man at the altar and the animal on it builds an expectation: God will one day provide a Priest and an Offering that are truly, perfectly without blemish.

Hebrews makes the connection explicit. The Aaronic priests were 'made after the law of a carnal commandment,' but Jesus is a priest 'after the power of an endless life' (Hebrews 7:16). They were many, because death cut them off; He continues forever. They had to offer first for their own sins; He had no sin of His own (Hebrews 7:27). Every limitation of the old priesthood was a signpost pointing to the One who would have no limitation.

The same is true of the offerings. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4); it covered and pointed forward. The unblemished animal was a picture, and the picture cried out for the reality. When John the Baptist saw Jesus he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Centuries of spotless lambs had been training Israel to recognize that moment.

So we should read Leviticus 21 and 22 not as a dead-end legal code but as a chapter in a story whose climax is Christ. The shadows were good and God-given, but they were shadows; the body is of Christ (Colossians 2:17). To stop at the shadow is to miss the whole point. To follow the shadow forward is to arrive at the cross.

This shapes how we honor the Old Testament. We do not bind its ceremonies, but we treasure them as God's own arrows pointing to His Son. The unblemished priest and the unblemished lamb were never the destination; they were the road to Calvary.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The priest and sacrifice were a tutor lifting Israel's eyes toward a perfect Priest and Offering.
- Hebrews 7 contrasts the limited Aaronic priests with the eternal, sinless Christ.
- Animal blood could not take away sins; it pointed forward (Hebrews 10:4).
- The body is of Christ (Colossians 2:17); the shadows were the road, not the destination.
- We treasure the Old Testament as God's arrows pointing to His Son, without binding its ceremonies.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the repeated 'without blemish' build an expectation that points beyond the Old Law?
- What specific contrasts does Hebrews 7 draw between Aaron's priests and Christ?
- Why is it a mistake to stop at the shadow rather than follow it forward to Christ?

Question 6

Student Question:

Malachi rebuked Israel for bringing lame and sick animals to God's altar, saying, 'Offer it now unto thy governor.' Where might you be offering God something you would be embarrassed to offer a person you respect?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Malachi 1 is one of the most pointed passages in Scripture about blemished worship. God's people were bringing blind, lame, and sick animals to the altar, and God said through the prophet, 'Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee?' (Malachi 1:8). The logic is devastating. They would never insult a human official with such a gift, yet they offered it to the Lord of hosts.

That question reaches across the centuries and finds us. Would I be embarrassed to give my employer the effort I give God in worship? Would I dare hand a respected mentor the distracted, half-hearted attention I sometimes hand the Almighty? When the honest answer is yes, I would be embarrassed, then Malachi's rebuke is mine to hear.

The point is not that God is impossible to please or that He demands flawless performance. It is that our worship reveals our estimate of His worth. We naturally bring our best to those we hold in highest honor. When God consistently receives our worst, the problem is not a scheduling failure; it is a worship failure, a heart that has not reckoned with His greatness.

This question asks the student to apply Malachi's test directly. Picking a concrete area, giving, service, attention in worship, and asking whether he would offer the same to someone he deeply respected, exposes where his valuation of God needs to grow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Malachi's test: would you offer this to a human official you respect?
- Worship reveals our true estimate of God's worth.
- The issue is not flawless performance but a heart that honors God's greatness.
- Applying the test to a concrete area exposes where our valuation of God needs growth.

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your worship or service would you be embarrassed to offer the same to a person you respect?
- Why does what we bring to God reveal what we truly think of Him?
- What would raising the quality of your gift to God look like this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Why does it matter that those who handle holy things must themselves be holy? How does Leviticus connect the character of the servant to the integrity of the worship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Leviticus ties the character of the servant to the integrity of the worship. The priest who handled the holy things had to be holy; the offering placed on the altar had to be unblemished. Both halves of these chapters press the same truth from two directions: holy worship requires holy servants and holy gifts. You cannot separate the integrity of the worship from the integrity of those who lead it.

This is why the defilement laws and the marriage restrictions for priests mattered so much (21:1-15). A priest whose life was careless, defiled, or compromised would undermine the very holiness he was supposed to represent. The people would learn from his life as much as from his words. A holy God served by an unholy mediator sends a contradictory message about who God is.

Scripture carries this principle straight into the New Covenant. Those who lead in the Lord's church are held to high standards of character (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) precisely because they handle holy things and represent God before His people. The qualifications are moral and spiritual, not ceremonial, but the underlying logic is the same one Leviticus taught: the servant's character cannot be divorced from the service.

There is also a warning here against hypocrisy in worship. Worship offered by hands that are unholy in daily life rings hollow. God sees the whole person, not just the public ritual. The integrity He desires runs from the altar back through the worshiper's ordinary days.

So Leviticus presses every servant of God toward consistency. The holiness we display in worship must be the holiness we pursue in life. Anything less makes the worship a performance rather than an offering.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holy worship requires holy servants and holy gifts; the two cannot be separated.
- An unholy mediator sends a contradictory message about a holy God.
- The same principle undergirds New Covenant leadership standards (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1), moral not ceremonial.
- Worship from a life that is unholy in daily conduct rings hollow.
- God desires integrity running from the altar back through ordinary days.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the character of the one who serves affect the integrity of the worship?
- How does this principle reappear in the New Testament standards for leaders?
- What is the danger of separating public worship from private holiness?

Question 8

Student Question:

In what part of your life is there a gap between the holiness you profess on the Lord's Day and the way you actually live during the week? What is one step toward closing that gap?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Most of us carry a quiet gap between the person we are on the Lord's Day and the person we are on Tuesday afternoon. We sing of holiness, then live the week as though God were not watching. Leviticus, with its seamless demand for holiness in priest and offering alike, exposes that gap and invites us to close it.

The gap is not closed by becoming more religious on Sunday. It is closed by carrying the reverence of worship into the week, by letting the God we adore in the assembly govern our speech, our temper, our integrity, our private choices. Holiness was never meant to be a Sunday costume; it was meant to be a life. The priest was holy at the altar and away from it, or his holiness meant nothing.

This is humbling, because it means our worship is only as credible as our weekday walk. But it is also freeing, because it points to a wholeness God wants to give us, a life that is all of a piece,

where what we profess and what we practice finally agree. That integrity is itself a kind of worship.

The question asks the student to name one specific area where the gap is real and to take one step toward closing it. Specificity matters; holiness grows not by general resolutions but by concrete obedience in the place where the gap is widest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Many live with a gap between Sunday profession and weekday practice.
- Holiness is a life, not a Sunday costume.
- Worship is only as credible as the walk that surrounds it.
- God offers a wholeness where profession and practice agree; that integrity is worship.
- Holiness grows through concrete obedience in the widest gap, not vague resolutions.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is the gap widest between your Sunday worship and your weekday life?
- What would it look like to carry the reverence of worship into that area?
- What one concrete step will you take this week to close the gap?

Question 9

Student Question:

How is Christ both the perfect High Priest (Hebrews 7:26–28) and the perfect, unblemished offering (1 Peter 1:18–19; Hebrews 9:14)? Why is it good news that the One who serves at the altar and the gift on the altar are both flawless, and how does that secure our access to God in a way the Aaronic system never could?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here the two halves of Leviticus 21 and 22 converge gloriously in Christ. The Old Law required an unblemished priest and an unblemished offering, two separate requirements met by two separate things, the man and the animal. In Jesus, astonishingly, the Priest and the Offering are one Person, and both are flawless. He is the great High Priest who is 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners' (Hebrews 7:26), and He is the Lamb 'without blemish and without spot' whose precious blood redeems us (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Consider what this secures. The Aaronic high priest had to offer first for his own sins, then for the people's, year after year, because neither he nor his sacrifice could finally settle the matter (Hebrews 7:27; 10:1–4). Every limitation built in delay and repetition. But Christ, having no sin of His own and being Himself the perfect offering, made one sacrifice for sins forever and sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12). The unblemished Priest offered the unblemished Sacrifice, and the work was finished.

This is why our access to God rests on a foundation the old system never had. Under Aaron, a defect in the priest or a blemish in the animal could invalidate the approach. Our standing rests not on our own perfection but on His. 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' (Hebrews 9:14). The spotlessness is His; the benefit is ours.

It is also why this priesthood needs no successor and this sacrifice no repetition. Because Christ continues forever, He 'is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them' (Hebrews 7:25). The old priests died and were replaced; our High Priest never dies and is never replaced. The old sacrifices were repeated because they never sufficed; His is never repeated because it fully sufficed.

The good news, then, is that the holiness Leviticus demanded has been perfectly supplied in our Substitute. We do not climb to God on the ladder of our own unblemished record; we come through a Priest and an Offering that are flawless on our behalf. That is the gospel hidden in these ancient laws, and it is the surest ground a sinner could stand on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- In Christ the Priest and the Offering are one Person, and both are flawless.
- He had no sin of His own, so His one sacrifice was sufficient and final (Hebrews 7:27; 10:12).
- Our access rests on His spotlessness, not our perfection (Hebrews 9:14).
- His priesthood needs no successor and His sacrifice no repetition (Hebrews 7:25).
- The holiness Leviticus demanded is perfectly supplied in our Substitute.
- This is the gospel hidden in the ancient laws and the surest ground for a sinner.

Discussion Prompts

- How is it good news that the Priest and the Offering in Christ are both without blemish?
- Why could the Aaronic system never give the access that Christ secures?
- What does it mean for your assurance that your standing rests on His spotlessness, not yours?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking across these two chapters, and remembering that you are now part of a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5,9), what is one specific way the Lord is using this passage to form you into someone who offers Him your best, as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

These chapters began with a holy God who demanded holy servants and unblemished gifts, and they end, for us, at the cross where a flawless Priest offered a flawless Sacrifice. But the story

does not stop there. Through Christ, every Christian is now part of 'an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 2:5), 'a royal priesthood, an holy nation' (1 Peter 2:9). The priesthood Leviticus restricted to Aaron's line has, in Christ, opened to all His people.

That changes everything about how we read this lesson. We are not spectators of an ancient ritual; we are priests with an offering to bring. And Romans tells us what the offering is: 'present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service' (Romans 12:1). The unblemished animal has become the surrendered self. The altar has become daily life. The call to give God our best has become the call to lay our whole lives on His altar.

So the formation question of this lesson is direct: knowing that you are a priest and that your life is the offering, where is God forming you to give Him your best rather than your leftovers? Perhaps it is in your giving, your time, your purity, your attention in worship, your willingness to serve when it costs you. The Lamb gave Himself without holding back; He is teaching His priests to do the same.

Let the student leave with one concrete commitment, a single area where, this week, he will bring God the unblemished rather than the convenient, because the holy God who gave His best for us is worthy of our best in return.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every Christian is now a royal and holy priesthood in Christ (1 Peter 2:5,9).
- The offering is the surrendered self: a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).
- The altar has become daily life; the call is to give God our best, not our leftovers.
- Christ gave Himself without holding back and forms His priests to do the same.
- Formation aims at one concrete area of wholehearted, costly offering this week.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for you, today, that you are part of a royal priesthood?
- In what specific area is God calling you to offer Him your best rather than your leftovers?
- What one commitment will you make this week to present your body a living sacrifice?