

Chapter 9 Leviticus 1-27

Holiness

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.'" Leviticus 19:1-2

When we get into the Story we begin to realize that there is a more radical character to the very parts of the story that we are in the habit of overlooking. Yet these neglected parts of the story truly deserve to be read and digested. Invariably they prove to be a corrective to our watered-down understanding of God's holiness and our user-friendly attitude toward salvation. If we ignore God's story in Leviticus we lose the depth and significance of what Christ has done for us and what God seeks from us. Leviticus is like a deep, dark hue that gives the picture of the Gospel depth by highlighting the work of Christ. There are definite shades of Leviticus in Romans and especially in Hebrews. We see Leviticus in the background of the Gospels when Jesus dealt with the law and the call of discipleship.

Some may take the tact that Leviticus is all about ritual and tradition and that the message for us today is to incorporate rituals into our lives. But that's not what Leviticus is about, and any generalized abstraction of its message misses the power of the story. The key focus in Moses' Exodus sequel is righteousness, not ritual; salvation, not stability. This is not a story for the fainthearted who domesticate deity and shrink God down to their expectations, but it is for the faithful who are learning to let God be God. Leviticus is so focused on the dynamics of relating to the Holy God that human feelings are nearly forgotten. The theological orientation overwhelms therapeutic concerns and rivets our attention on the presence of God. There is not a line in Leviticus that caters to the modern preoccupation with self, not a line! Leviticus is for the theologian what Song of Songs is to the psychologist.

The story impresses upon us the absolute nature of God's holiness and our essential, comprehensive need of forgiveness. Leviticus explores what it meant for Israel to be God's "treasured possession" in the wilderness, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5). The parallel between the people of God then and now shapes our understanding of Leviticus. The apostle Peter emphasized this connection when he described the church as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Pet 2:9). We even see the deep, dark earth tones of Leviticus behind Jesus' call to holiness in the Sermon on the Mount, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

Set Apart

Leviticus picks up where Exodus leaves off. Added to the series of set apart places, objects and acts in Exodus is the story of a set apart people in Leviticus. By hearing Israel's story we get a better idea of what our Lord has in mind when he calls us out of the world in order to send us back into the world. We learn what it means to be "in the world, but not of the world." God's message to the Israelites was clear, "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy...I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be

holy, because I am holy" (11:44-45). From worship rituals to sexual relations God was determined to set Israel apart from the nations as a holy nation dedicated to God. "The Lord said to Moses, `Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord" (18:1-5). God's agenda was clear, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (19:1). And it is clear today. The apostle Peter applied this same text to the followers of Jesus Christ, "As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: `Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Pet 1:14-16).

Our first impression of Leviticus may be that it is a rather pedantic list of archaic offerings, exacting procedures, and strict rules. But if we put aside our list making and our bottom-line thinking and hear the story of Leviticus we will discover God's powerful object lessons of redemption. We will better understand the depth of our depravity and God's absolute insistence on atonement. We will more fully appreciate the need for God's propitiation, purification and reconciliation. And we will grasp more seriously God's call to holiness in our practical daily living.

The apostle Paul described the law as a special tutor or mentor designed to help us pay attention to the gospel of Christ (Gal 3:24). This is a fitting description of the message of Leviticus, which expresses objective truth in concrete acts of repentance and righteousness. True spirituality was not so much explained as exhibited. There was little room for theory or commentary, but considerable attention given to visual demonstrations and physical acts of confession, consecration and cleansing. There is a kinship between Leviticus in the Old Testament and the book of James in the New Testament. Both insist that faith without works is dead. "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18). From slain bulls to skin diseases, the object lessons of Leviticus help the light of the Gospel shine more brightly. Leviticus sensitizes us to the awesome holiness of God and pervasive contamination of sin. It adds the dark hues which highlight the truth of Christ's sacrifice, giving depth to our understanding of the Gospel.

God set his people apart through a series of special offerings, priestly ordinations, dietary restrictions, physical conditions, holy days and ethical prescriptions. God did this without consulting, polling, or asking for advice. God simply commanded. Without debate or dialogue, Yahweh prescribed and defined holiness. The story line in Leviticus is simple, "The Lord said to Moses, `Say to the Israelites..." This often repeated introduction reminds us that Leviticus is a narrative, not a manual, and that Moses embodied Israel's hope of a personal relationship with Yahweh. Whatever authority was extended to Aaron and the Levites, it was superseded by Moses' relationship with the Lord. Through Moses, God called Israel into his presence and set them apart as a holy people. He did this through a series of visual aids that stressed Israel's need for forgiveness and made them sensitive to the contamination of sin. For all the earthiness of Leviticus with its animal sacrifices and bodily discharges, its message is about the invisible

realities of God's holiness, our sinfulness, and God's plan to fulfill his promise to Abraham ("...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Gen 12:3). Thus, salvation history continued by symbolizing critical truths that God did not want forgotten.

Sacrifices

Leviticus begins with a detailed description of five offerings that were to be presented at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (the Tabernacle of Testimony). Four of the five offerings, beginning with the Burnt Offering, involved sacrificing an animal without defect as a redemptive substitute for the worshiper. "He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him" (1:4). The priest sprinkled the blood of the slain bull or lamb or dove on the altar and then burned up the sacrifice on the altar. The symbolism recalls Abel's sacrifice, Abraham's altar, and the Passover Lamb. There was no theological explanation for this substitutionary atonement. Presumably these actions spoke for themselves. The important thing is that they were commanded and commended by the Lord. "It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (1:9,14,17). The Grain Offering often accompanied the burnt offering and was given to the Lord to express gratitude and to support the priests.

The three remaining offerings dealt with the remission of sins and were distinguished by the intentions of the worshiper. The Fellowship or Peace Offering could be given as a free will offering or an expression of thanksgiving or to signify a vow (7:12-16). In a Burnt Offering the entire animal was consumed in the fire but in a Fellowship Offering the meat could be eaten by the worshipers.

The Sin Offering, also called the Purification Offering, was called for when the worshiper became aware of particular sins. This offering stressed a person's need for purification, rather than God's propitiation, although the theme of substitutionary atonement remained essential. This offering was given "when anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands" (4:1; see 4:13,22,27). It covered sins of omission (5:1) and sins of commission. It was a constant reminder to the Israelites that they were judged not by their feelings, but by God's standard of holiness. Whether or not a person knew they were sinning at the time did not change the fact that they were guilty. "If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be held responsible" (5:17).

The fifth offering was the Guilt or Reparation Offering. Only a ram was to be offered as an atoning sacrifice, along with whatever monetary value was needed to make restitution. If a person's sin involved inadvertently or intentionally cheating the Lord or a neighbor, payment must be made to compensate for the loss. "He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering. And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the Lord, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the Lord, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty" (6:5-7). The impact of all five offerings sends a powerful twofold message. First, we cannot come into

the presence of God for any reason, even to express thanksgiving or praise, without first dealing with our sin. Sin is the pervasive reality that must be faced whenever we encounter the Holy God. Second, the devastating effects of sin are felt in every aspect of life, in our relationship to the Lord, with others and within ourselves. True healing is required in all dimensions affected by sin. Therefore, we need God's wrath to be propitiated, our lives to be purified, and our relationship to others restored. The various spiritual, psychological, relational, and ethical needs represented by these offerings speak of the primary importance God places on our redemption. As the hymn reminds us, God's saving grace is necessary in many ways: "Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, Evermore His praises sing" (*Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven*, Henry F. Lyte).

The sacrificial system was God's multimedia message on human sinfulness and divine forgiveness, but one element took precedence over all others. Within all of these analogies and models of redemption, blood was the critical symbol. "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (17:11). As the author of Hebrews said, "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22).

There are some eighty references to blood in the book of Leviticus. It is such a dominate theme that we cannot miss it. The blood of the slain bull or lamb or ram was sprinkled on all sides of the altar, symbolizing the price that was paid to make atonement for the worshiper. At the ordination of Aaron and his sons, Moses "slaughtered the ram and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot" (8:23). The blood symbolized the purification and consecration of the priests. "The priest must have consecrated ears ever to listen to God's holy voice; consecrated hands at all times to do holy deeds; and consecrated feet to walk evermore in holy ways" (quoted in Wenham, p.143).

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron was commanded to offer a bull for his own sin offering "to make atonement for himself and his household" (16:6). He entered the Most Holy Place and with his finger sprinkled blood from the slain bull seven times before the atonement cover. Then he slaughtered a goat "for the sin offering for the people" and sprinkled the goat's blood on the atonement cover (16:15). He was also commanded to sprinkle blood on the altar. Following this hidden work, he publicly laid both his hands on a live goat, the scapegoat, and confessed "all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites--all their sins--and put them on the goat's head" (16:21). Then the goat was led into the desert, symbolizing the sins of the nation being carried off to a place cut off from the covenant community. When Aaron finished, he removed his simpler linen garments and dressed in his more impressive high priestly clothes, and proceeded to publicly "sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people, to make atonement for himself and for the people" (16:24). Blood was the dominate symbol throughout the entire ceremony. It was absolutely essential for making atonement and removing the defilement of sin.

The entire ceremony existed as a dramatic object lesson in redemption, its symbolism calling out for fulfillment and explanation. The flick of Aaron's finger, sprinkling blood over the atonement

cover and altar, pointed forward to the high priest "who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (Heb 7:26). Aaron sacrificed for his sins and the sins of the people repeatedly, but Jesus did not need "to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself" (Heb 7:27). "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins," wrote the author of Hebrews, but now "we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus" (Heb 10:4,19).

God's concern to guard the integrity of the symbolism of blood can be best understood in the light of its ultimate fulfillment in the blood of Jesus. Therefore, the extreme measures prescribed in Leviticus to guard the sanctity of blood are best understood in the light of blood's theological significance. It is for this reason that God declared, "If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people" (7:27). And it is not for health reasons, but for theological reasons, that a married couple were not to have sexual intercourse during a woman's monthly period. "He has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them must be cut off from their people" (20:18). Wherever blood was an issue, the Israelites were forced to think theologically.

If anyone sacrificed "a cow, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it instead of bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord--that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood and must be cut off from his people" (17:3-4). Not only were there dire consequences for anyone who offered sacrifices to idols (17:7), but no one ate meat without making a sacrifice for sin. Gordon Wenham writes, "...In the wilderness no secular slaughter is permitted. If an Israelite wished to eat meat, he must bring his chosen animal to the tabernacle as a peace offering. There the priest would kill it in the approved way, sprinkle the blood and burn the fat. The [person] offering it would then receive back the flesh of the animal to eat" (Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p.241).

If the truth that God sought to impress upon his people in the wilderness also impressed believers today, we would have a deeper reverence for the holiness of God, and a greater awareness of our constant need for forgiveness. If we felt the impact of the message of Leviticus, we would not take "such a great salvation" for granted (Heb 2:3). We would "pay more careful attention" to the gospel of grace, "so that we [would] not drift away" (Heb 2:1). I am sure the actual experience of laying a hand on a lamb and slaughtering it "before the Lord" and watching the priest sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides left a profound impact on the worshiper. But how much more meaningful our salvation should be, having "our hearts sprinkled" by the blood of Jesus, "to cleanse us from a guilty conscience" (Heb 10:22).

Undoubtedly the Israelites in the wilderness took God seriously when they sacrificed their burnt offerings, how much more should we take God seriously, when "the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin" (1 Jn 1:7). It is tragic if our freedom from the sacrificial system, with its shedding of the blood of bulls and lambs, distances us from the reality they represent. Jesus Christ is not an illustration for things to come. He's not an object lesson or metaphor. Jesus is the embodiment and the fulfillment of God's long anticipated gift of salvation. "In him we have

redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Eph 1:7).

Holiness Code

God insisted on setting Israel apart as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5) and he left no doubt in anyone's mind as to the seriousness of his commands. Aaron and his sons commenced their ministry with a demonstration of God's power and blessing. "...The glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown" (9:23-24). But soon after Aaron had delivered his blessing to the people, that very same fire of the Lord consumed his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, "and they died before the Lord" (10:2). This tragedy is shrouded in mystery. All we are told is that "they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command" (10:1). Moses' response to Aaron seems to have offered little sympathy, "This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: 'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored'" (10:3). We have no idea how Aaron felt about this. All we are told is that "Aaron remained silent." However in the course of the day Aaron's two remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, offered a sin offering, which permitted the priests and their families to eat the leftover meat portions. But instead of eating it they burned it up.

When Moses found out, he was angry. Had the meat been refused out of indifference to God's provision and Moses' command? Was this meant to be a sign of Aaron's refusal to cooperate? Aaron quickly set the record straight. His family's self-imposed fast was out of Aaron's sensitivity to God's judgment against his family. He replied to Moses, "Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" (10:19). Aaron had concluded that it was far better to be sensitive to God's will than insensitive to it. And who could blame him?

God's insistence on holiness and obedience didn't cease with the Old Testament. The dramatic deaths of Ananias and Sapphira right at the beginning of the early church serves as a striking parallel to the death of Aaron's two sons. The fact that "great fear seized the whole church" (Acts 5:11) should remind us that the awesome, even devastating, holiness of God is present under the new covenant as well as the old.

The solidarity of God's people in the wilderness was established by God's initiative and insistence. It was a carefully orchestrated plan. God chose the arrangement and the instruments. He set the rhythm and tempo. And like all good conductors he insisted on the people's undivided attention. He centered the people, physically and spiritually at the Tabernacle, the symbol of his presence. He imposed dietary restrictions and commanded the isolation of people suffering from infectious skin diseases. Houses and clothing contaminated by spreading mildew were to be destroyed. No one with a physical defect could serve as a priest. "No man who has any defect may come near...to present the offerings made to the Lord by fire" (21:18-21). The priests had their work cut out for them. They were under orders, "You must distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses" (10:10-11).

In addition to the rules governing sacrifices and distinguishing between clean and unclean animals, houses, and people, God gave explicit rules prohibiting certain types of sexual relations, such as sex with a close relative, homosexuality, bestiality, and adultery. Israel was definitely not to participate in the immoral sexual customs of the surrounding cultures. The word of the Lord was emphatic, “Everyone who does any of these detestable things—such persons must be cut off from their people. Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God” (18:29-30).

The unusual juxtaposition of various laws has mistakenly led to a dismissive attitude by some of the holiness code in Leviticus. Statutes against dishonoring parents, idolatry, stealing, and lying are listed alongside laws which we dismiss today, such as “Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard” (19:27), or, “Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material” (19:19). The argument is made that the prohibition against same gender sex is as culturally conditioned as the prohibition against holding back an employee’s wages overnight (19:13) or planting a field with two kinds of seed (19:19). However, the fact that profound moral prohibitions are interspersed with situationally specific cultural prohibitions does not disqualify the moral precepts. To reason otherwise is to disparage our ability to discern what is fundamental to moral order and what is peripheral.

The list of laws in Leviticus draws attention to the overarching intent of the holiness code. In every detail, these precepts were designed to set apart the people of God from the surrounding cultures. This was done in every area of life from worshipping God to working in the fields, and from showing compassion to the poor to making clothes. Leviticus did not distinguish between ethical and ethnic purity or moral and cultural purity because the primary issue was the solidarity of God’s set apart people. For example, the distinction between clean and unclean animals was not primarily for health reasons. A case can be made that some of the dietary restrictions protected the Israelites from getting certain diseases, but their main point was for symbolic reasons. God turned the animal world into a parable, a metaphor for his choice of Israel as a treasured possession among the nations. The distinction between Israel and the Gentile nations was symbolized in the distinction between clean and unclean animals. Of course, the day was coming, because of Jesus Christ, when the object lessons of clean and unclean animals and the whole sacrificial system would no longer be needed.

Jesus foreshadowed this when he said, “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a person ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what makes a person ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean’” (Mt 15:16-20). Later, the apostle Peter in his dramatic vision of “all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air,” would be told, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:12,15). Two days later in the presence of Cornelius, a Gentile, Peter made the connection between animals and people. He understood the significance of the vision, when he

said, “God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28). The old distinctions were collapsing under the new reality of the Gospel.

The solidarity that God insisted upon for Israel in the wilderness meant that the integrity of the community came ahead of the rights of the individual. We can’t help but hear this story and imagine the emotional impact of being “cut off” from the covenant community. This was the penalty for violating God’s will by intentionally desecrating the sacrifices, engaging in immoral sexual relations, and practicing idolatry. God required Israel to solemnly guard the purity and faithfulness of the community as a whole by removing individuals who refused to follow God’s expressed will. Even though this punishment sounds harsh and extreme to modern ears, and seemingly impossible to apply in many of our churches, the apostle Paul followed this tradition when he challenged the believers in Corinth to expel the immoral brother. “A man has his father’s wife,” wrote Paul. “And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?” His counsel was clear, “hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:1,2,5). What was true in the Old Testament is still true in the New Testament. If individuals are permitted to disregard and violate the commands of God without being judged by the biblical community, the identity and purity of the people of God as a whole will suffer.

Individuals who disobeyed God’s commands were “cut off,” but many other individuals bore the stigma of being “unclean” because of something that they had no control over, such as giving birth to a child or contracting an infectious skin disease. We imagine the devastating emotional impact upon those suffering from an infectious disease being required to tear their clothes, mess up their hair, veil the lower part of their face, and warn people away with cries of “Unclean! Unclean!” (Lev 13:45). It must have been awful for any of Aaron’s descendants to be born with a physical defect, because it meant that they were ruled out of priestly service. “No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles” (21:18-20). For such a person to “go near the curtain or approach the altar” was, from God’s perspective, to “desecrate my sanctuary” (21:23). The bottom line was that human contamination and deformity was incompatible with the wholeness and holiness of God. As harsh and as unfair as it may seem, there were far larger issues at stake than personal feelings and individual rights. God impressed upon the Israelites their true state of depravity by turning their diseases and deformities into object lessons.

In the light of these restrictions, it is important to note that God protected people from abuse. Those disqualified from the priesthood for some deformity were to be supported in the same way as the priests (21:22). God commanded that the disabled were not to be mistreated. “Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord” (19:14). God commanded the Israelites, “Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (19:18). However, there’s no question that the plight of the human condition confronted the Israelites in a way which was as disagreeable as it was necessary. The stigma of being “unclean” or being disqualified because of a disability, reminded the Israelites that the mess of the human condition was incompatible with the holiness of God. Therefore, whatever represented human defilement

and disability could not be brought into the presence of God. Undoubtedly this message was intended for the whole community of God's people, but it was especially borne by those individuals who were either "unclean" or disabled.

Perhaps the most surprising truth about the connection between Leviticus and the New Testament is the amazing patience God demonstrated in working out salvation history. God's attention-getting object lessons set up the ministry of the Incarnate One. These provocative illustrations existed in the consciousness of the Israelites for centuries before they were brought to their climatic conclusion in Jesus. Three important observations can be made:

First, such people embody the reality that is true for all human beings. Paul clearly testified to this in Romans when he wrote, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

Second, Jesus focused his ministry on the very people who were ostracized under the law. His own description of his ministry emphasized this: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have [skin diseases] are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Mt 11:5). It was precisely those people, whom the Pharisees had designated "unclean," that Jesus reached out to with open arms, explaining, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk 2:17).

Third, when Jesus died on the cross he bore the disgrace symbolized by all who had been "cut-off" or designated "unclean" by Levitical law. The author of Hebrews applied Jesus' redemptive death to the logic of Leviticus, when he wrote, "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood." This is a powerful description of God's love and compassion for all those who have been written off as "damaged goods," for all who represent the mess of the human condition, which of course includes all of us. The author of Hebrews didn't stop there but went on to challenge us to follow our Lord's example, "Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore" (Heb 13:11-13).

The further we go in the story the more we realize that Israel on its own failed to be God's treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5). The redemptive rituals, righteous precepts, and distinctions between the holy and the profane, between unclean and clean, could not make the people holy. These external laws were designed to symbolize what it meant to be "set apart," but they could not transform the people from the inside-out and make them holy. They were an external standard, declaring in every area of life, including work, worship, ethics, community, bodily life and spirituality, how much all of us need to depend upon Christ's righteousness and not ourselves for salvation. It is only through Christ that we can become "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light." And it is only through Christ that we will have the strength, "as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires" and be a set apart people (1 Peter 2:9,11).