

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

5-12-21

Leviticus 17

Prohibition of sacrifice outside the tabernacle - Verses 1-4

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: 'This is what the LORD has commanded: ³ Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it ⁴ instead of bringing it to the entrance to the tent of meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD—that person shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; they have shed blood and must be cut off from their people.'

17:1 Chapters 17-26 are sometimes called the "holiness code" because they focus on what it means to live a holy life. The central verse is 19:2, "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."

17:3 Why were the Israelites prohibited from sacrificing outside the tabernacle area? God had established specific times and places for sacrifices, and each occasion was permeated with symbolism. If people sacrificed on their own, they might easily add to or subtract from God's laws to fit their own lifestyles. Many pagan religions allowed every individual priest to set his own rules; God's command helped the Israelites resist the temptation to follow the pagan pattern. When the Israelites slipped into idolatry, it was because "everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 17:6).

17:1-4 This command runs completely contrary to the way most people come to God in our culture. The modern world is characterized by an entirely individualistic way of coming to God, where each person makes up their own rules about dealing with God as they see Him.

The right way to bring sacrifice - to the tabernacle, through the priest - Verses 5-9

⁵ This is so the Israelites will bring to the LORD the sacrifices they are now making in the open fields. They must bring them to the priest, that is, to the LORD, at the entrance to the tent of meeting and sacrifice them as fellowship offerings. ⁶ The priest is to splash the blood against the altar of the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting and burn the fat as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. ⁷ They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves. This is to be a lasting ordinance for them and for the generations to come.' ⁸ "Say to them: 'Any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice ⁹ and does not bring it to the entrance to the tent of meeting to sacrifice it to the LORD must be cut off from the people of Israel.'

17:7 The "goat idols" (also called demons) were objects of worship and sacrifice in ancient times, particularly in Egypt from which Israel had recently escaped. God did not want the people to make this kind of sacrifice in the wilderness or in the Promised Land, where they were heading.

17:5-9 There was a spiritual reality behind the pagan gods, but the reality was really demonic. In sacrificing to Baal, Ashtoreth, and others, they really worshipped demons. Paul says essentially the same thing in 1 Corinthians 10:20-21: Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. There is a sense in which all worship that is not directed to God is directed to the devil and his demons.

Prohibition against eating blood - Verses 10-12

¹⁰ "I will set my face against any Israelite or any foreigner residing among them who eats blood, and I will cut them off from the people. ¹¹ 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. ¹² Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may any foreigner residing among you eat blood."

17:10-12 I will set My face against that person who eats blood: This was a strict command, but the reason was simple: For the life of the flesh is in the blood. The idea was that all life belonged to God, and since blood is an emblem of life, it specially belonged to God.

And I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: Additionally, blood was the means by which atonement was made - therefore, to eat blood was to profane it. Pagan rituals celebrated the drinking of blood, and God also wanted a separation from these pagan practices.

Thus, as a matter of practice, all animals that were butchered in Israel were drained of blood as much as possible. Not all nations did this. "It appears from history that those nations who lived most on it [blood] were very fierce, savage, and barbarous, such as the Scythians, Tartars, Arabs of the desert, the Scandinavians, [and so forth], some of whom drank the blood of their enemies, making cups of their skulls!"

17:11-12 How does blood make atonement for sin? When offered with the right attitude, the sacrifice and the blood shed from it made forgiveness of sin possible. On the one hand, blood represented the sinner's life, infected by his sin and headed for death. On the other hand, the blood represented the innocent life of the animal that was sacrificed in place of the guilty person making the offering. The death of the animal (of which the blood was proof) fulfilled the penalty of death. God therefore granted forgiveness to the sinner. It is God who forgives based on the faith of the person doing the sacrificing.

How to respect God's command regarding blood - Verses 13-16

¹³ "Any Israelite or any foreigner residing among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, ¹⁴ because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off." ¹⁵ "Anyone, whether native-born or foreigner, who eats anything found dead or torn by wild animals must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be

ceremonially unclean till evening; then they will be clean. ¹⁶ But if they do not wash their clothes and bathe themselves, they will be held responsible.”

17:14 Why was eating or drinking blood prohibited? The prohibition against eating blood can be traced all the way back to Noah (Genesis 9:4). God prohibited eating or drinking blood for several reasons: (1) To discourage pagan practices. Israel was to be separate and distinct from the foreign nations around them. Eating blood was a common pagan practice. It was often done in hopes of gaining the characteristics of the slain animal (strength, speed, etc.). God's people were to rely on him, not on ingested blood, for their strength. (2) To preserve the symbolism of the sacrifice. Blood symbolized the life of the animal that was sacrificed in the sinner's place. To drink it would change the symbolism of the sacrificial penalty and destroy the evidence of the sacrifice. (3) To protect the people from infection because many deadly diseases are transmitted through the blood. The Jews took this prohibition seriously, and that is why Jesus' hearers were so upset when Jesus told them to drink his blood (John 6:53-56). However, Jesus, as God himself and the last sacrifice ever needed for sins, was asking believers to identify with him completely. He wants us to take his life into us, and he wants to participate in our lives as well.

17:15-16 If one came upon an animal that had died naturally (or was something like modern road kill), one could eat it, because good meat shouldn't go to waste. But the person who ate it was regarded as ceremonially unclean, needing washing.