

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature,

Session 13, Case Laws, Leviticus

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

All right, so are you ready to dive into Leviticus? I mean, we got a lecture on Leviticus, and honestly, it's one of those books that just makes you go, huh. Yeah, Leviticus, it's one of those books that kind of gets a bad rap, I think, sometimes. Yeah.

You know, it's got a lot of rules and regulations. A lot of rules. And it can seem kind of intimidating, I think, to modern readers.

Absolutely. But it's also a book that's full of really profound insights into the nature of God and our relationship with him. Okay, so before we jump in, can you tell us a little bit about where this lecture comes from? Yeah, sure.

So this is a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt. He's a professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. And this lecture was part of a series on the book of Leviticus that he gave.

Okay, cool. So Dr. Hildebrandt, what does he focus on in this particular lecture? Well, he really dives into the heart of what Leviticus is all about, and that's holiness. Holiness, okay.

He explores what it means to be holy, how God is holy, and how we as human beings can live holy lives. Okay, so holiness. That's a big topic.

It is. It's kind of a loaded word, I think, for a lot of people. What does it even mean to be holy? Yeah, that's a great question.

And it's something that Dr. Hildebrandt really spends a lot of time unpacking in this lecture. You know, I think a lot of times we tend to think of holiness as being kind of this unattainable standard of perfection, like you have to be like a saint or something, you know? But what Dr. Hildebrandt shows is that holiness is actually a lot more approachable than we might think. Okay, so it's not about being perfect.

No, it's not about being perfect. It's about being set apart. It's about being different from the world around us.

It's about living our lives in a way that reflects God's character. And how does Leviticus help us understand that? Well, Leviticus is full of all these rules and regulations about things like what you can eat, what you can wear, how you're supposed to worship, and so on. Right, the purity laws.

Exactly, the purity laws. And a lot of people look at those laws, and they think, well, this is just a bunch of arbitrary rules. Yeah.

You know, who cares if I eat shellfish or wear mixed fabrics? Right. It can seem kind of random and outdated. Yeah, it can.

But what Dr. Hildebrandt shows is that these laws actually have a much deeper meaning. Okay. What is it? They're about teaching us how to live and write relationships with God and with each other.

Okay. So the purity laws are about relationships. Yes.

They're about creating boundaries and distinctions that help us to understand who God is and who we are in relation to him. Okay. They're about creating a sense of order and holiness in our lives.

So it's not just about following the rules for the sake of following the rules. No, it's about understanding the heart behind the rules. Okay, that makes sense.

It's about understanding the why behind the what. So Dr. Hildebrandt is basically arguing that the purity laws are like a guide to living a holy life. Yes, exactly.

They're a way of helping us to see the world through God's eyes. That's interesting. Yeah.

But it still seems pretty challenging. You know? I mean, how do we even begin to apply these ancient laws to our modern lives? Yeah. That's a good question.

And it's something that we're going to explore in more detail as we go along. But I think one of the key things to remember is that we're not under the law. We're under grace.

Okay. So we don't have to follow these laws perfectly. We don't have to be afraid of making a mistake.

Yeah. But we can still learn from them. Okay.

I like that. So we can learn from the purity laws without feeling like we're bound by them. Yes, exactly.

We can use them as a way to grow in our understanding of God and our relationship with him. I think that's a really helpful way to frame it. So before we get too deep into the purity laws, though, I want to go back to that idea of holiness that we were talking about earlier.

Can you tell us a little bit more about what Dr. Hildebrandt has to say about that? Sure. One of the key things that he emphasizes is that holiness is not just an attribute of God. It's also something that God can bestow on us.

Wait. So God can make us holy? Yes. Exactly.

He can set us apart for his purposes. And how does he do that? Well, in Leviticus, we see a lot of examples of God using rituals and ceremonies to sanctify people and objects. Okay.

Like what? Well, for example, there's the ceremony of the Day of Atonement, where the high priest would offer sacrifices to cleanse the people of their sins. Right. There's also the ceremony of the Ordination of the Priests, where they would be anointed with oil and set apart for their sacred duties.

Okay. So these rituals were a way of transferring God's holiness to people and objects. Yes, exactly.

They were a way of making them holy. That's fascinating. And it makes me think about that whole thing about touching the Ark of the Covenant.

You know how it says that anyone who touches it will die? Yeah. Is that an example of holiness, too? Yeah, I think it is. Yeah.

You know, the Ark of the Covenant was the most sacred object in the Israelite religion. It represented God's presence among his people. Right.

And so the fact that anyone who touched it would die shows just how powerful and dangerous God's holiness can be. It's a reminder that we need to approach God with reverence and awe. And that we shouldn't take his holiness lightly.

Exactly. Okay. So we've talked about holiness.

We've talked about the purity laws. It's a lot to take in. It's a lot to think about.

It is. But I think it's really important stuff. I agree.

And I'm glad that we're taking the time to really dive into it. Me too. So before I move on, I want to address something that I know a lot of people are thinking right now.

Yeah. And that is the question of whether or not Leviticus is still relevant for us today. You know, we live in a very different world than the ancient Israelites did.

Right. So do these laws and rituals and ideas even apply to us anymore? That's a great question. Yeah.

And it's one that we're going to tackle head-on in the next part of our deep dive. Okay. Great.

So stay tuned, folks. We're going to be right back with more on Leviticus. It's going to be good.

All right. All right. So we're back, and we're ready to tackle that big question.

Is Leviticus still relevant for us today? Right. Because, I mean, let's face it, a lot of those laws and rituals can seem pretty weird to us modern folks. Yeah.

Like seriously, who even thinks about not wearing clothes made of mixed fabrics anymore? Exactly. But here's the thing. Even though the specifics of those laws might not apply to us directly, I think the principles behind them are still incredibly relevant.

Okay. So it's not about the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law. Exactly.

And that's what Dr. Hildebrandt really tries to get at in his lecture. He's not so concerned with telling us exactly how to follow every single rule. He's more interested in helping us understand the deeper meaning behind those rules.

Okay. So what is the deeper meaning? What's the big takeaway here? Well, one of the key themes that Dr. Hildebrandt emphasizes is the idea of holiness as separateness. Separateness.

Yeah. Remember we were talking earlier about how holiness isn't just about being good. It's about being set apart.

It's about being different. Right. And that's what the purity laws are all about.

They're about creating a distinction between the Israelites and the people around them. So it's like a cultural identity thing. Like we're the people of God, and we do things differently.

Exactly. It's about establishing a unique identity based on their covenant relationship with God. That makes sense.

But it still seems kind of arbitrary. You know? Like, why are certain animals considered unclean? What's the logic there? Yeah. That's a good question.

And there are a lot of different theories out there. One theory is that it has to do with hygiene. Hygiene.

Yeah. Like some of those unclean animals might have been more likely to carry diseases. Right.

So it was kind of a way of protecting people's health. Okay. That makes sense.

Another theory is that it has to do with what's considered taboo or disgusting in a particular culture. The yuck factor. Exactly.

And Dr. Hildebrandt actually talks about this in his lecture. He draws on the work of a sociologist named Mary Douglas, who argued that every culture has its own sense of what's considered polluting or out of place. And he suggests that the purity laws might have been a way of reinforcing those cultural norms.

So it's like God is saying, hey, I want you to avoid these things because they're considered unclean by your culture, and I want you to be set apart. Right. And it's not necessarily that those things are inherently wrong or evil.

It's more about creating a sense of order and holiness. Okay. So it's about drawing boundaries.

Yeah. Exactly. It's about creating distinctions between what's holy and what's not holy.

But then how do we decide what's holy and what's not holy in our own culture today? I mean, things have changed a lot since the time of the ancient Israelites. Right. And that's where I think we need to be careful about just trying to impose those ancient laws onto our modern context.

Okay. I don't think it's about trying to figure out, you know, exactly which animals are unclean or what kind of clothes we should be wearing. Right.

I think it's more about understanding the principles behind those laws and then applying those principles to our own lives in a way that makes sense for us today. So how do we do that? Well, I think one way is to ask ourselves: what are the things in our culture that are considered taboo or disgusting? Okay. And I'm not necessarily talking about things that are morally wrong.

I'm talking about things that just make us feel uncomfortable or icky. Like what? Well, it could be anything. Yeah.

You know, like maybe it's the way that we treat our bodies. Maybe it's the way that we consume media. Maybe it's the way that we interact with each other online.

Whatever it is, I think it's worth asking ourselves: why do we feel that way about those things? Right. And is there something that God might be trying to teach us through those feelings of discomfort? So maybe those feelings of disgust are actually a sign that we need to create some boundaries. Maybe.

And maybe those boundaries are about protecting our own spiritual health, just like the purity laws were about protecting the physical health of the Israelites. That's a really interesting way to think about it. So you're basically saying that we can use our own cultural sense of what's yucky as a guide to living a holy life.

I think so. Yeah. And I think it's a way of making those ancient laws relevant for us today.

I like that. So it's not about following the rules blindly. It's about understanding the heart behind the rules and then applying those principles to our own lives.

Exactly. And I think that's a much more meaningful way to approach Leviticus than just trying to figure out exactly what we can and can't eat. Absolutely.

So we've talked about holiness as separateness. We've talked about the purity laws as a way of creating boundaries. And I think all of this is really starting to paint a picture of what it means to live a holy life.

Yeah. But there's one more piece of the puzzle that I want to explore. And that's the idea that holiness isn't just about what we avoid.

It's also about what we embrace. It's about cultivating certain practices and habits that draw us closer to God. And that's something that Dr. Hildebrandt talks about in his lecture as well.

He calls it the positive side of holiness. Okay. So what are some examples of these positive practices? Well, he talks about things like prayer and worship.

He talks about acts of service and generosity. He talks about spending time in nature and just being in awe of God's creation. So it's about actively seeking out ways to connect with God.

Exactly. And it's not just about doing these things out of obligation. It's about doing them out of love and joy.

Because when we truly love God, we want to spend time with him. Exactly. Yeah.

And we want to live our lives in a way that pleases him. I think that's a beautiful way to put it. So holiness isn't just about avoiding what's bad.

It's also about embracing what's good. Exactly. And it's about finding that balance between the two.

Okay. So we've covered a lot of ground in this deep dive. We've talked about holiness.

We've talked about purity. We've talked about the relevance of Leviticus for us today. It's been a lot.

It has. But I think we've only just scratched the surface. Right.

There's so much more to explore. And we're going to continue exploring in the next part of our deep dive. I can't wait.

So stay tuned, folks. We're going to be right back with more on Leviticus. All right.

So we're back. We're talking Leviticus. We're talking holiness.

We're talking purity laws. All this stuff. It's a lot.

Yeah. But you know what else it is? What's that? It's pretty mind-blowing. I mean, when you really start to think about the implications of this stuff, it's like, whoa.

Yeah. No, I totally agree. I mean, it really challenges you to think differently about the world and about your place in it.

Right. And that's what I love about these deep dives. You know, we get to really dig into these ancient texts and wrestle with these big ideas.

It's not always easy. No. But it's always rewarding.

Absolutely. So speaking of rewarding, let's talk about some of the rewards of living a holy life. Because let's be honest, sometimes it can feel like a lot of work.

You know? Yeah. All these rules and restrictions. It can be kind of a drag.

Right. It can. But I think it's important to remember that the point of holiness isn't to make our lives miserable.

Right. It's to make our lives better. Okay.

So what are some of the benefits of holiness? Well, one of the biggest benefits is that it brings us closer to God. Okay. You know, when we live holy lives, we're essentially saying to God, I want to be like you.

I want to reflect your character in the world. And when we do that, we open ourselves up to experiencing his presence and his power in a whole new way. So it's like holiness is the key to unlocking a deeper relationship with God.

Exactly. And that's a pretty amazing reward, if you ask me. It is.

And it makes me think about all those stories in the Bible about people who encountered God in really powerful ways. You know, like Moses in the burning bush or Isaiah in the temple. Right.

I mean, those were holy encounters. Absolutely. And they were life-changing.

Yeah. And I think those kinds of encounters are still possible for us today. Yeah.

You know, we might not see a burning bush. Probably not. But we can still experience God's presence in really tangible ways if we're open to it.

And how do we become more open to it? Well, I think it starts with cultivating a heart of holiness. Okay. It's about making a conscious decision to set ourselves apart for God's purposes.

And that goes back to what we were talking about earlier with the purity laws, you know? Exactly. It's about creating those boundaries in our lives. It's about saying no to the things that pull us away from God and yes to the things that draw us closer to him.

So it's like a daily choice. Yeah. I think so.

It's about being intentional about the way we live our lives. And it's about remembering that holiness isn't just about what we do. It's also about who we are.

Right. It's about becoming more like Christ. Okay.

So we've talked about the rewards of holiness. We've talked about the importance of making a conscious decision to live a holy life. But I think there's one more thing we need to address before we wrap up this deep dive.

What's that? And that's the question of how we deal with the fact that we're not perfect. You know, we're all going to mess up. We're all going to fall short.

Right. So how do we keep moving forward on this journey of holiness even when we stumble? Yeah, that's a great question. And it's something that I think a lot of people struggle with.

I know I do. Me too. But I think the key is to remember that God's grace is always available to us.

Okay. You know, we don't have to be perfect in order to be loved by God. Right.

And we don't have to be perfect in order to experience his forgiveness. So when we mess up, we can just confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. Exactly.

And we can trust that God will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And then we can get back up and keep moving forward. Right.

It's like learning to walk. You know, when a baby is learning to walk, they fall down all the time. Yeah.

But they don't give up. They keep getting back up and trying again. And eventually they learn to walk.

Right. And it's the same with holiness. Yeah.

You know, we're going to fall down. We're going to make mistakes. But the important thing is to keep getting back up and keep moving forward.

And to remember that God is always there to help us. Absolutely. Wow.

This has been an amazing deep dive. I feel like we've learned so much about Leviticus and about holiness in general. Me too.

It's been a real privilege to explore these ideas with you. Likewise. So what would you say is the biggest takeaway from all of this? What's the one thing you hope our listeners will remember? I think the biggest takeaway is that holiness is not something that's out of reach for us.

It's not just for saints and super spiritual people. It's for all of us. Exactly.

It's for anyone who wants to draw closer to God and experience the fullness of his love and his power. I love that. So if you're listening to this and you're feeling challenged or inspired by what you've heard, I encourage you to take some time to reflect on what it means to live a holy life in your own context.

Yeah. What does it look like for you to set yourself apart for God's purposes? What are some practical steps you can take to cultivate a heart of holiness? These are questions that we can all be asking ourselves. And I think the answers will be different for each of us.

But the journey is worth it. Absolutely. Well said.

Well, folks, that's all the time we have for today's deep dive. I want to thank you for joining us on this journey through Leviticus. And a big thanks to you for sharing your insights with us.

It's been my pleasure. I hope this has been helpful and encouraging for you. And I hope it's sparked a desire in you to learn more about holiness and to pursue it in your own life.

That's the goal. All right. So until next time, keep digging deep, keep seeking truth, and keep the conversation going.

Stay holy. Thanks for listening.