

Our God is Holy

Written on: December 31, 2022

Article by: Dave Knutson

In Leviticus, God spoke directly to his people more than in most other books. The book even begins with the phrase “and the Lord called to Moses”. Thus, the book came to be named “and the Lord Called”. Leviticus then, comes directly from God and is filled with his authority. It reveals the will of God as it lays bare the nature of God

As it turns out, the God who is revealed is holy, and wants his people to be like him. For the sake of their salvation, God chose a people and initiated a makeover. He did this so that they could be holy and he could truly possess them as his own.

If you think that God’s not detail oriented, Leviticus will change your mind. It is filled with ritual and step-by-step instruction. When these are added together and properly understood, they establish the starting point for grasping the nature of New Testament salvation. That is why the apostle Paul said that the law acted as a child-conductor, a pedagogue, to bring us to Christ (Gal 3:24)

By New Testament times, God’s people knew all about atonement and purification. Things clean and unclean set boundaries within which they lived in order to enter God’s presence and participate in his holiness.

God used everyday language – but infused those words with divine meaning. He wanted Israel to be ready, when the sacrifice to end all sacrifices arrived. He did this so that when his plan of salvation was finally unveiled, the ‘lights would come on’ and it would all make sense.

God also wanted his people to appreciate the high privilege of 24/7 access. Access to God, made possible, not because God had become less holy, but because he had fashioned a way for his people to become holy and fit for his presence

This article is a bit like a movie trailer, skipping over a few of highlights of the book, while always coming back to the recurring theme, that the God of Israel is a holy God.

Most of us do not use the word ‘holy’ very much in everyday conversation, while the kind of use that we do hear is often disrespectful and irreverent. Yet holiness is commonplace in Leviticus and the focal point of the book.

The word itself means separate, or removed from, or distinct. We get a hint about what God meant by it, by what he insisted upon. In order to draw near to God, a person had to be ritually clean, spiritually ready and physically whole.

God did not tolerate disease or infirmity. No one stumbled unprepared or uninvited into his presence, and those who did prepare, did it according to God’s rules.

Even then, direct access was not to be had. Formal worship was mediated by priests, who had in turn been set apart. God’s set-apart people approached God through his set-apart priests – because -God himself is set-apart. He is in every way, holy.

In scripture, there are two things to which the word Holy refers. One of those is rooted in the eternal being of God, because God is one of a kind. He is eternal and in a class completely by himself. He is the living God, the one and only, and there is no other.

When introducing himself to Moses, God identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But when Moses asked for his name, in other words, his nature, God said “I am that I AM”. What God meant, was that unlike the gods of Egypt, He actually exists and does so eternally. This means that all other things which exist, have been created by God. Given the absolute and eternal existence of God, there is no one else worthy to be worshipped.

Furthermore, since he is the living God, and death is a penalty imposed by him, therefore death and disease are banished from his presence. God insists, that people should be whole in body and clean in spirit, just as he created us in order to ‘draw near’.

This first kind of holiness is rooted in the person of God who is transcendent. He is infinite, in the duration of his existence and dimensions of his being. There is therefore a great gulf fixed between the creator and the created. True deity is not something that one can become. You either are God or not God, but there is no becoming God.

For this reason, the bible is full of warnings about getting too close. Flesh and blood cannot endure the being and presence of God, nor can they inherit his kingdom. There is then a holiness, a distinct separateness ascribed to the the eternality of God...that is expressed as the glory of God

This part of God’s holiness is anchored in the essence of his being. He is ontologically different, consisting as it were of other stuff. So this first kind of holiness must always remain between Him and everyone else. God cannot bestow deity, nor can we attain it.

It is worth noting, that in Leviticus, God is a person and not merely a force. Israel knew him by the covenant name of Yahweh. Since he is a person, He thinks before acting and sometimes shares his thinking with his people.

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Apologetics is our reasoned defence of our belief in God and our obedient actions. It is a Bible word, *apologia*. The word pictures one who is presenting his case before a court of law. This is how the apostle Paul used the term in 2 Timothy 4:16, "At my first defence (*apologia*) no one stood with me, but all forsook me." Importantly, Paul also connects it specifically to the gospel message: "I am appointed for the defence (*apologia*) of the gospel" (Philippians 1:16). This course helps equip us to give a reasoned defence of many important eternal truths: God's existence and nature, the deity of Jesus, the gospel of His death and resurrection for our salvation and the inspiration of the Bible.

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God has never been silent. He spoke and the cosmos came into being. He spoke again to fill it with information, most of which we are still just discovering. He coded it in DNA and did packet transfers in RNA. He trans-coded a 4 character language using a 3 character transfer script and then reconstructed it all back to the original. He does that – every time a cell divides and it happens microscopically using data compression and built-in fail-safes. It's not just the heavens that declare the glory of God, the building blocks of life do it too because God is a person.

On that personal level, he has done what we do, putting ideas into words. The Bible is the verbal-propositional word of God. It is reasonable and rational so that we can know it and do it. God wants us to know him in much the same way we know each other. The one who knows our innermost thoughts wants us to know his. The scriptures in general & Leviticus in particular invite us to do just that.

Yet perhaps the most important aspect of his person is his character. God is a good person. He is righteous and pure. He is always truthful and as good as his word.

This is the second kind of holiness. God created us for our eternal good and for his eternal glory, and regardless of our choices, that is why God made us. Yet to live with Him forever, we need to know him now and obey him daily. This is why when God called his people, it was to be holy, to be pure and righteous. When he called them out of Egypt, it not so much to a place as it was to a state of righteousness.

Now holiness or personal goodness calls for moral capacity. Part of what it means to be made in the image of God, is the ability to function in a world where right and wrong are real. God has made us all with a sense of right and wrong and then gone on to populate that ability with real content. It's not just that the categories of right and wrong exist. God has embedded values in us that are more specific than that. Our moral DNA insists that truth ought to win out over falsehood. That we ought at least to love those who have loved us first.

The golden rule has a built-in rightness to it that does not need to be defended or explained. It sounds right because it is right. Thus Leviticus speaks to damaged hearts, to set them right by calling them right back to, the heart that made them.

When we fail to be good, when we fail to be godly, the Bible calls that, sin. Sin then is the second barrier between us and God. But unlike the eternity of God, this kind of holiness is a choice.

That distance – the spiritual one between sinners and God, is there all through Leviticus. God used physical distance to communicate spiritual distance to say, that until sin has been dealt with, there is no getting close to God. Yet, even when the mind is pure, the body clean and sins are forgiven – a distance remains.

Now if all of that was all that we knew about God was; that he is high and holy; eternal in the essence, infinitely powerful and righteously pure, we would have no reason to hope. The sacrifices found in Leviticus restore hope by providing the means by which holiness might be recovered.

Both kinds of holiness were on display at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 20. The Hebrew writer puts it this way:

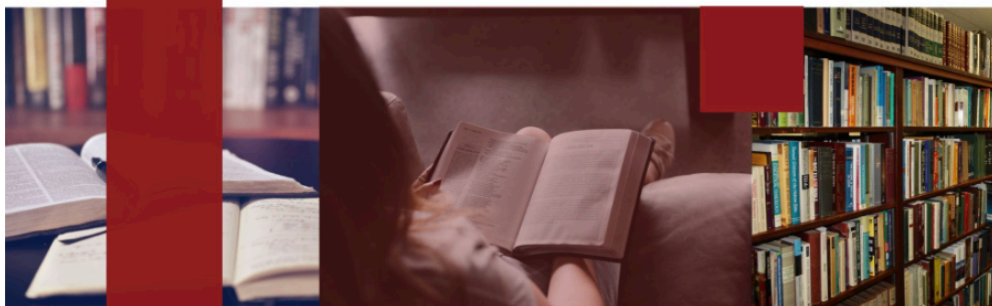
For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who hear begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." (12:18-21)

The voice of God came down from heaven. He spoke audibly and coherently in voice that shook the mountain. Even Moses trembled and the people begged for God to spare them. Everything that God said was good and right, but his presence was too much. Later in Deut 5, Moses explained that Mt Sinai was not about intimidation. What he wanted from Israel, was the sort of fear that led to obedience.

God has only ever wanted to bless, and when his people fear him and obey him, then he is free to do just that. It is important then that God is not only good but graciously good. All people have a duty to worship God, but not all are qualified to do so. Leviticus is

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about God preparing a people to enter his presence, where duty is transformed into privilege by those who have been made holy.

Leviticus then is about God bridging these two chasms and condescending to bind himself to Israel. The God whom heaven and earth cannot contain, caused his name to dwell in one place in the midst of his people. The living God who imposed a death penalty on all sinners, allowed himself to be surrounded by a camp filled with the sick and dying. And God who is righteous and pure, found a way to unite with a people who constantly sinned.

All of this, step by step, God did, because he wanted to save. That is what grace is about. As long as the law of Moses was in effect, each of these barriers remained and Leviticus explains why that was so.

It has always been a dangerous thing to live in the presence of a holy God, and utterly terrifying to be married to a jealous God.

Jealousy sometimes gets a bad rap. When you are jealous, you are zealous for and attached to that which is yours. It's not like coveting, where you want what belongs to others. God is jealous over the things which he owns, which just happens to be everything.

Now I don't know if you have ever thought about what that means. In the natural realm, the jealousy of God takes the form of providence. God created the world and maintains it in good running order. It comes with a warranty which will one day run out, but for now, He upholds this world through the power of his word.

Historically, God has gone one step further and joined himself to the nation of Israel. He chose that nation to be uniquely his and his union with them was a bit like, but not exactly the same as marriage.

When Pat and I married, we chose to belong to each other in a way that excluded all others. If we drift from that exclusivity, each of us has every right to be jealous.

Yet I did not create my wife. She does not belong to me as I belong to God. God has two reasons to be jealous where I just have one.

This is why God forbid Israel to make idols or worship other gods. Every idol is therefore necessarily a lie. A finite object can never represent an infinite god. The essence of spirit is never captured by physical matter. And you cannot begin to approach true goodness except through the precepts of heaven – revealed in scripture from the heart of God.

Consider then, that as long as God is jealous, the world remains, right side up. Things are as they ought to be. For if God were not jealous, then he's given up on us. He has abandoned ownership and cancelled his covenant, and those who were once his people are truly without hope.

God wanted and still wanted and still wants to be one with his people. He wants each one of us to know firsthand, the joy and blessings of his love. There's a sample of those in Leviticus 26 where we find a tidal wave of blessings for those who obeyed and a tsunami of curses for double-crossing him.

The kind of sin that's "in God's face" has always been deadly. God distinguished between that and the sort of sin that is non-intentional, by providing a way to put things right

This is what atoning sacrifice was for. It was a spiritual road back to him. God gave it, knowing that his people would have to use it over and over. He promised never to stop forgiving those who truly returned.

All of God's commands were based on ownership. The land was his as were his people who lived in the 'land of promise' as tenants Lev 25:23. Only their rights as tenants be sold, and then, every 50 years, God returned them in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:14-17). Every Israelite was in debt to God, who kept forgiving the debt. Every lender was a debtor, who on God's orders forgave their borrowers

The books were balanced every 7 years. Slaves were set free and debts written off. Lev 25:39-55. Ownership was stewardship with God calling the shots.

It just makes sense then that God demanded the best. It wasn't just that sacrifices had to be the best. God demanded the best place in every heart and the first place every mind.

We understand from Leviticus, that God is not really interested in your stuff. He wants you, but he can't have you if value your things ahead of God. To help Israel to do this, God claimed the first of the harvest, even while the crop was still in the field. God said, "trust me". You cannot out-give me.

Instead of insisting that people die for their sins, God allowed animal substitutes. Sin was still real and so was death. The wages of sin have always been death of the sort that is not merely an abstraction or figure of speech.

This was brought home when you slaughtered the animal yourself. It was a dirty, sweaty, noisy, stinky, bloody business, because sin is expensive. It damages your soul and there is no cheap fix.

Two of Aaron's sons died on the day that he took office. God is deadly serious about sin, and those who are not, are just plain dead. We must tread carefully then the sacred pages of Leviticus, for it takes us into that divine mind that planned to save us before he made us.

The day is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. It will come freely from those who have done so in life, and compelled from those who have not.

How much better to bow before him and confess his lordship now. To be bought with better blood and cleansed so completely, that God the Spirit will come to live inside of you. For you will have been made holy by the blood of Jesus Christ. That is what happens when you turn from sin and are immersed into Christ. You come alive here and now and begin a life with God that need never end. An eternal life with God, who is what forever is all about.

The Price of Repentance

Written on: December 31, 2022

Article by: Dave Knutson

Now there are some important layers to the matter of ownership that help us understand our text. Consider for example – home ownership. In Canada this right is extended to us by various levels of government. The most common type of ownership is called Fee Simple. When granting such rights, government sets boundaries for personal ownership while retaining some of its own. If I own my property outright where there is no mortgage on it, no liens, easements, rights of way or other encumbrances against it, that is about as good as it gets. The property is mine and no one else owns it.

But my ownership is not absolute.

Various levels of government do in fact retain the right to levy taxes and also the right to take it away from me should I refuse to pay. They may also choose to take my property for some form of public use through the process of expropriation upon the principle that the good of the community or the nation have a higher claim on the land than do the interests and the good of an individual. There are layers of ownership at work in my own backyard that are similar to those present in our text.

Our discussion actually takes in Leviticus 5:14-19 as well as Leviticus 6 and 7.

In this passage, the kind of sacrifice that is in view is called the '*reparation*' sacrifice. It is associated with making reparation (paying someone back) for goods wrongly taken from their rightful owners. Sometimes the rightful owner is God alone and at other times it includes my neighbour. The focus is more on the price of making things right than it is on what it was that you did that was wrong. It is the wrong committed that renders a person guilty before the Lord, and demands payment in at least two forms, one of which was the guilt or reparation sacrifice.

Repentance is required in this process which involves two stages. It is not enough to feel guilty or prodded by a guilty conscience. God designed our consciences to do just that and they work and as long as we don't grow calluses over them. Recognizing that we have done wrong is the first step.

In several of the examples given in the text, the fact that a wrong has taken place might largely be a secret. If I had defrauded someone, I would know it and God would know it and he sets to work through the conscience that he has placed within me.

Yet in order for repentance to be real, it must set out to make things right. Right at the top of the list of things that need to be done is a repayment that addresses the fraud that has taken place. Someone has been cheated out of some kind of property and that property or a value in its place must be restored. You will have noticed that in addition to the value taken, a surcharge or additional penalty of 20% was added. The amount paid back was 120% of what was taken.

Here are two examples of when and how this was to be done.

1. Leviticus 5:15

- If a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the Lord's holy things, then he shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord: a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation in silver by shekels, in *terms of* the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering.

2. Leviticus 6:2:

- "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the Lord, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted *to him*, or through robbery, or *if* he has extorted from his companion, or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do

Thus there were cases when a person defrauded God, and then others when a person defrauded their neighbour.

How might a person defraud God? One hint comes from the word 'ma-al' 'to sin' which carries the connotation of a sacrilege. A sacrilege is the opposite of 'to sanctify'. It is a violation that causes that which was sanctified to become unclean. Thus, if a person lied and took an oath in God's name to prop up the lie, they brought a form of uncleanness into the presence of God. Leviticus 6 combines this with defrauding a neighbour and then covering it up by swearing in God's name.

This was a sin against God's holy things. Both of these sins called for reparation. The things of God needed to be purified again and God's name unentangled from the lie. For when a person lied and then called on God to witness to his integrity, he multiplied his sin. The wrongful taking of an oath in God's name was one such offence

Now of course, a person might sin against the 'things of God' by withholding a tithe or failing to follow God's laws regarding the redemption of the firstborn. Any and all such failures, even when done in ignorance, made a person guilty

In cases when God had been wronged, the sacrifice came first, and reparations were paid later. The sacrifice rendered the person pure again and then, in that reinstated condition, they were able or qualified to pay God his due. If the fraud was against a neighbour, then the reparation came first and the sacrifice second.

There were three steps in this process regardless of who had been defrauded.

1. The person had to appear before Lord at the tabernacle and make a public confession of their sin. This was perhaps the hardest part, especially when the person had knowingly taken what belonged to another. It was doubly hard when they had added God's name and reputation to the mix for a person willing to swear falsely, was willing to resort to almost anything to get away with their crime.

Furthermore, confession meant – that it was all made public. Exposed and humbled and with a ruined reputation, others would no longer take them at their word. There was a personal price for sin and deception, and one that they might take a lifetime to overcome.

2. And then, having confessed, they had to make full restitution of what had been taken. If the item or animal in question was still in their hands, they had to give it back. They had to give it back in as good a condition as it was in when taken. If they no longer had it, they had to pay its fair market value so that a replacement could be had.

3. And then as a further penalty – they had to add another 20% to the value of what was stolen. This was to compensate the victim for the personal harm done and the use of their possession during its absence.

Leviticus 6 provides several examples of what might have happened. Perhaps someone left something on deposit with you for safekeeping and then it went missing. You could not get out from under your obligation to pay them back. Suppose that someone agreed to care for 2 of your cows while you were gone, and of course to return them when you get back. If one wanders off and is lost, they would have to replace it.

A dishonest person might take the property of another to market and sell it. They might compound their sin by swear to God that they don't know what happened to it. They might even hold some

threat over the owner's head, thus taking it away by force – like paying protection money to the mob. They might threatening to expose some embarrassing thing that you would rather keep secret... extortion can take many forms. This legislation addresses reparation of all sorts

If you lost property and I found it, failure to report that I have, is the same as theft.

Then there is always robbery...the taking by force what someone else is not strong enough to keep. If done by night, the robber might manage to keep his identity a secret.

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No matter how it was done, each of these forms of wrongful taking or wrongful keeping, made a person guilty. The victim was deprived of their property and their property rights. Added to that, they suffered the loss of a sense of security. All victims of crime feel violated and are forced to feel that the world is no longer the safe place that they once thought that it was.

The second layer of personal ownership is the fact that God is the ultimate owner of everything. When someone steals my stuff, they also steal God's stuff. It is an offence against God.

In Psalm 50: 10-12, God declared:

"For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills.

"I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. "If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains.

Not only must I make things right with my neighbour, I must also make them right with God.

Remorse must give way to Repentance, which in turn calls for confession. It demands repayment along with an added premium. To square things with God, the reparation sacrifice was an absolute must. God required it and to fail to offer it and to go fully public with one's crime – left the person guilty before God and cut off from Him.

The good news was, that God had provided a way back – for those who violated His covenant through theft, fraud and deceit. The sobering news was, that repentance is expensive. Yet, no matter the expense – including a fallen reputation, repentance was always worth it. It was always the right thing to do.

Abiding Principles:

The first is that we ought to value our own consciences above all else. A clean conscience is priceless. It is therapeutic and exactly the thing that God wants us to have. To live at peace with God and to experience the kind of peace of mind that is rooted in doing the right thing...is a blessing from God. That is why God provided the reparation offering and why repentance remains God's antidote to sin

Which raises some personal questions:

- Is there anything in my life that I need to set right?
- Is there something that only I know about, but of which I need to repent?
- Have I given God his due?
- Have I been fair with others, do some debts remain?

God urges us to put things right first with our brothers and sisters, before seeking his presence and favour. We do not have to live from day to day with a burden of guilt. God wants us to repent of sin and wrongdoing and he wants us to do whatever is in our power to set things right. To admit sin, repay our debts and to the extent possible, undo the harm that has been done. Then and only then can we come boldly into the presence of God to seek his forgiveness and to offer acceptable worship.

Oath or no oath, God has bound himself to Christians. His Spirit lives within. His reputation in this world is ours to uphold or to bring into disrepute. Our sins reach up to and affect his holy things...as they once did with Israel.

Quoting from Isa 52:5, the apostle Paul said of Israel that: ...“the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” just as it is written. May that never be true of us.

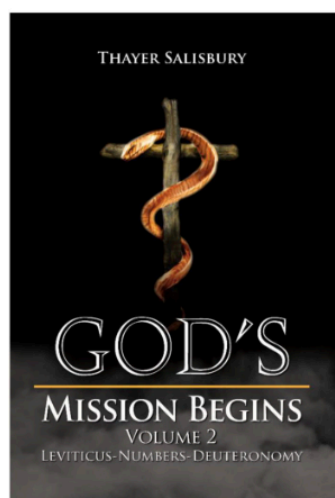
Here is even better news: Isaiah 53:10 speaks of the messiah as our ‘guilt offering’. But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief;
If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.

There is that word again.

The word ‘asam’ is used to describe the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. The sacrifice that **atones** for our sins also pays the debt that was ours for **defrauding** God of his due. . It puts right the sacrilege of our unholiness. When Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, he offered to God the fullest satisfaction for sin that was possible. He made reparation for our sins and those of the whole world which in turn allowed God to declare that He had received back all that was lacking.

This is the blessing that is ours in Christ, now and forever more.

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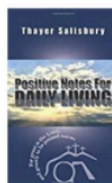
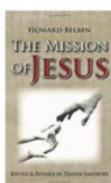
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Unholy worship is an insult to God!

Written on: December 31, 2022

Article by: Roy Davison

Some translations have the more literal ‘strange fire’ in verse 1. The word ‘strange’ in this context refers to something that is unholy or profane because it has not been authorized by God for use in a sacred setting.

True worship is an expression of submission to God. By offering a sacrifice that God had not commanded, Nadab and Abihu demonstrated arrogance and presumption before God. They did what they wanted to do, rather than what God had told them to do.

They were engaging in “will-worship,” which is condemned in Colossians 2:23. “Will-worship” is self-chosen worship. It lacks divine authority. It may look or sound good to man, but because it has not been prescribed by God, it is profane, it is unholy. Offering unholy worship shows disrespect for the holiness of God. It is an insult to God. It is like serving soup in a dirty chamber pot!

Had God forbidden them to do what they did? Not specifically. But God has always instructed us to worship Him according to His word, and not according to our own desires.

They *had indeed* disregarded a command of God: “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified” (Leviticus 10:3).

Nadab and Abihu died without having children (Numbers 3:4). But they have a multitude of spiritual children! Or should we call them ‘unspiritual’ children?

In our time, millions of people worship God by doing things He has **not** commanded. Unauthorized forms of worship are ‘strange’ elements in a sacred setting, and are therefore unholy. Such ‘worship’ shows disrespect for God and His word.

This is the most fundamental difference between the true church that Jesus established and denominations of human origin. Human churches worship and serve God in ways that He has not commanded. This shows arrogance, not submission. It shows presumption, not respect. Their worship is therefore worthless. This is what Jesus said to such worshipers: “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (Matthew 15:7–9).

They who worship God in spirit and in truth will be submissive and humble, being careful not to go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Members of human denominations, who are accustomed to doing all kinds of things God has never commanded, find it strange, for example, that churches of Christ do not observe Easter and Christmas as religious holidays, that they do not use incense,

candles or instruments of music, and that they do not have a central organization. But these are all things God has not commanded for His church.

True worshipers celebrate the resurrection of Christ each first day of the week when they come together to break bread as the first Christians did (Acts 20:7). God has never asked us to celebrate Easter or Christmas. Such things are profane. They are unholy. Why? Because it is something God has not commanded!

True worshipers praise God from the heart by singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, as commanded (1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). To use incense, candles and instruments of music in worship is to offer profane fire before the Lord. It is strange. It is unholy. Why? Because it is something God has not commanded!

True believers form congregations with elders, servants, evangelists and teachers as God has

commanded
(Philippians 1:1; 1
Timothy 3:1–13;
Titus 1:5–9). Central
ecclesiastical
organizations are
profane, they are
unholy. Why?
Because they are
things God has not
commanded!

We must worship
God in accordance
with His word,
which means that
we must omit from
our worship things
He has not
commanded! God
will reject our
worship if we offer
strange fire before
the Lord. Unholy
worship is an insult
to God. Let us
respect God's
holiness by
worshiping as He
has commanded.

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Holiness and Daily Bread

Written on: December 31, 2022

Article by: Dave Knutson

Let me suggest that we really ought to pay attention to this chapter in Leviticus, because there is more here than meets the eye. It is not really about T-bone over pork-chops, but about living within the boundaries set by God.

There seems to have been an underlying motive for these laws, the effect of which carries forward to our day and which applies to our own spiritual situation. It appears that God wanted to raise a number of social barriers between his people and those of the surrounding nations. He wanted to create a social distance that would be hard to bridge, because social integration with the pagan world would bring his people into contact with pagan gods and many forms of immoral conduct.

Here is how that works. When you want to get up close and personal with someone, it is most naturally done by sharing a meal. Table fellowship is about more than just food. It is about close personal relationships and feelings of home, comfort and belonging. If you cannot eat or drink with certain groups in society, then it is much more difficult to develop close personal relationships. Furthermore, if the people around you abhor the food that you do eat – if they are offended by it, then there is a natural tendency to back off.

The dietary laws that God put in place were intended to preserve the uniqueness of Israel and to create barriers safeguarding the faith of his people. These created degrees of separation to keep Israel from being swallowed up by an unbelieving world.

It is a principle that is carried over to New Testament. Christian fellowship is where we forge our closest relationships, and because there is danger in being unequally yoked with unbelievers, Christians are encouraged to marry, only in the Lord.

Food was perhaps only a secondary consideration then in Leviticus 11. Since it was often associated with pagan offerings, the food that Israel chose ran the risk of mixing social intercourse with religious practice. God wanted his people to remain separate from the world to preserve their faith and aid their obedience. When Daniel was taken into Babylonian captivity, he and the young men with him refused to eat the meat that was served. (Dan 1:3-20). They did not want to send a mixed message nor to violate their conscience. The last thing that they wanted was to offend God or make it seem that they honoured the gods of Babylon.

You will remember from the story of Joseph, that the Egyptians would not eat with Semitic people. This was why when Joseph first received his brothers, he seated them separately from himself (Gen 43:32). The Egyptians would never slaughter and eat cows because cows were sacred to some of their deities, but they would eat animals excluded by God's diet for the Israelites.

In Leviticus chapter 10, we noted that many of God's instructions were designed to teach Israel to make distinctions between things that were clean and unclean. Those categories extended to include food,, which would henceforth be considered either holy or unholy. Dietary laws not only allowed Israel to distinguishing between foods that were holy or unholy, but in so doing to choose obedience to God over disobedience. They kept God's people from crossing over into a state of unholiness

Israel was to be – holy to the Lord – in the sense of separated from the world and set apart for the special purposes of God within history. They were the extended family of Abraham, and it was through his descendants that one day all of the world

would be blessed. Salvation from sin would come through them which was shy mixing with the world in any way, was not an option.

Now Biblical scholars have suggested a number of ways of categorizing or understanding the classifications of animals – either on or off of Israel's diet

The first classification is Hygienic. It may have been that many of these animals that were more prone to carry disease or contamination were the ones on the prohibited list. Yet – while this may be true of some of these animals, the scriptures do not identify this as a reason.

- Furthermore, some of the unclean animals are not prone to disease or contamination – while some of the 'clean' animals are.
- And if physical harm was the main reason for making the distinction, then why would all of these unclean animals later be declared clean – by the teachings of the N.T.? (As in God's statement to Peter in the vision in Acts 10:15-16)



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A second way to categorize these animals pertains to 'Cultic' practices.

- So for example, Isa 65:4 associates the eating of pork with graveyard rituals.
- Or the vision that Ezekiel had in 8:10 where he saw all manner of creeping things and detestable animals being offered in the temple.

But once again, while it was true that some of the unclean animals were offered by pagans in worship, the Canaanites also used the many of the same animals that the Israelites did for sacrificial purposes. Therefore this distinction is not absolute.

A third way of trying to understand these distinctions is simply to say that God put them in place – arbitrarily. Holiness depended upon obedience, whether or not the reasons for the distinctions made any other sense. Kind of like, God saying 'do it because I said so'. The idea then is, that the will of God must be honoured even in matters as seemingly trivial dietary choices. God certainly has the right to declare something either clean or unclean, and in this way testing the obedience of his people.

Then there is the idea that these divisions of animals and foods are 'Symbolic'. The ancient Letter of Aristeas suggested – that chewing the cud reminded the people of

Israel that they ought to meditate on God's word. Others put forward the suggestion that carnivorous animals and birds which fed on carrion – were dirty – associated with death and decay and therefore prohibited because they *symbolized* filth and iniquity.

Besides, God had forbidden Israel to eat blood – because it symbolized life. Therefore Israelites were not to eat the eaters of blood. Animals which did what humans were forbidden to do – who broke God's rules for culture, were therefore unclean.

There is still another and more recent idea (by Mary Douglas) – about how to make sense of



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God's dietary laws. This one goes back to the Biblical principle that everything created by God ought to correspond to it's created order. Thus, holiness is that which *preserves* the order of creation put in place by God, and unholiness is that which mixes that order and blurs those distinctions, creating grey areas in between.

So for example, God created animals that walked on the land, flew in the sky and swam in the water. Each sphere had its own characteristic motion. Creatures who kept to their sphere and reflected the characteristics of the group – were clean. Those that crossed over – in some way, were unclean. Therefore, a fish that did not have fins or scales was unclean. It fell short of the characteristics common to most fish. Or in the case of leprosy, there was a growth – a plant invading human culture and thus rendering those who were infected, unclean.

Then finally, we might consider the approach that there is a combination of the symbolic with the preservation of the principles of the created order. (as Milgrom suggests). The idea is that this Leviticus 11 is all about teaching Israel a respect for life. It is respect for life that above all else moves Israel closer to the giver of life and thus the holiness of God.

Now in the world of sacrifice, all meat belongs to God. Israel was permitted to share this food – but only at God's table. Milgrom points out that it was a serious thing to take a life or to even touch a carcass. By reducing the number of animals on the dietary list, God was teaching his people to revere life. The taking of life to provide food was the exception and not the rule, and even then, one was to follow the rule of creation – partaking only of those animals that most closely adhered to the distinctions and categories put in place by God.

At the end of the day, none of these explanations are completely satisfactory, yet this last one offers a more consistent and comprehensive way of understanding how God came to make that distinctions that he did. It fits the context of our chapter and the purposes that God had for giving these instructions.

A recruitment poster for Meaford Church of Christ. On the left is a stylized illustration of a white lighthouse with a red cross on top, set against a black background with red wavy lines at the base. To the right of the lighthouse, the text reads: "We are seaching for a minister to fill the leadership role of the preacher, teacher, and pastoral care for our congregation." Below this, the church's name "Meaford Church of Christ" is written in a large, stylized font, with "Meaford" in a cursive script and "Church of Christ" in a bold, blocky font. At the bottom right, contact information is provided: "Please Respond To: Meaford Church of Christ, Minister Selection Committee, 113 Nelson Street West, Meaford, On N4L 1G3 Email: meafordcofc@gmail.com".

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So the categories of clean and unclean, holy and unholy – appear to call Israel back to the world in its pristine form – new and fresh from the hand of God. And as God had made everything good and right, perfectly suited for his purposes, he had also called Israel to carry out those purposes in a state of cleanness

Clean animals and clean food corresponded to God's people Israel and clean sacrifices represented the priests as they served in the sanctuary. Unclean animals were associated with the pagan world. A world that had crossed over to live in sin. A world at war with the purposes of God and determined to live in a state of ignorance...about God. It was unclean in large part because it had broken away from God and rejected the holiness that only He can impart.

Now of course, these 'physical' standards had 'spiritual' counterparts. God had called his people to be holy – both in body and in soul. Physical cleanliness and moral purity – went hand in hand. The physical world of clean food and pure bodies was supposed to point Israel in the directions of moral holiness and separateness from the world. And perhaps because the unseen world of the inner person is not often at the front of our minds...God used physical objects – declared clean – by Him, to remind his people of that unseen reality and the need for inner purity

In this way, sanctification is one of the underlying theological ideas of this chapter. The details that are set out – pertain to 'practical sanctification', with this chapter...spelling out what sanctification involves as it pertains to diet.

Now the information about food – in Leviticus 11, is offered up peace-meal, and that makes it easy to get lost in the details and lose sight of the big picture.

The big picture is theological.

- The theological message of the chapter – is that God wants each of his people to live a life of complete holiness to Him
- This holiness has to do with both their bodies and souls

As it turns out, this involves living according to God's order in creation.

- It is worth noting that many of these distinction remain today. They were affirmed by the son of God and later by the apostles.

So for example, when God created human beings, in his image, he created them both male and female. The man and the woman were joined in marriage, and this established God's order for marriage from that time forward. They were to be fruitful, to multiply and to replenish the earth.

It is not hard to see why God has always condemned homosexual and lesbian relationships. They can never constitute marriage nor contribute to the continuity of the human race. in I Cor 11, Paul pointed out another – 'order of creation' principle. When God created people, He made the man first and then the woman. It turns out, that this sequence was intentional.

As Paul explains, Adam man became the head of Eve, because she was created out of a part of his body. For that reason, it is God's will that in each marriage and in each

family, the husband is to lead as the head of the family. This is the standard to which the N.T. calls us – and is in accordance with God’s created order.

Thus we read in I cor. 11:3

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

In Eph. 5:22-24, Paul says

Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything

And then he explains this in I Tim 2:

But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

Each one of these teachings is connected with God’s order in creation, and while we are now sanctified in Christ, the doctrines and practices of the New Testament are rooted in purposes of God and in the pattern of established by Him...at creation

So, when God says...that this is my standard of holiness...we just need to pay attention. It is after all, God who has redeemed us...and made us into his people, and having done that, he has taken ownership of us. He has made us ‘holy’ so that He can live inside of us. God therefore reserves the right to demand that we imitate his holiness and obey each of his commands.

Now Leviticus 11:45 states that the God who brought Israel out of Egypt for the purpose of being their God...is furthermore – holy. Therefore, his people are to be ‘holy’ also, and if the reason why some food was clean and some was not – if that reason remains hidden – then so too do God’s reasons for choosing Israel in the first place.

Yet the fact remains that He did choose them. He chose them, redeemed them and sanctified them and they belonged to him and owed their allegiance to Him. The privileges conferred by the law also came with certain obligations under the law, and for Israel, those obligation included what they ate.

The kind of holiness that Israel enjoyed through union with God...was to be defined by the holiness of imitation, and of course there is more than just one aspect of God to imitate.

God expected his people to be honest and truthful...just like Him. They were to keep their promises and fulfill their vows. Every city was supposed to be safe from crime with a legal system – above reproach. The widow, orphan and alien came under special protection which was part of the holiness that God demanded. This holiness of imitation was also linked to the creative work of God. Since Israel’s God called the world into existence...Israel was to reflect his holiness by honouring the order imposed by God upon the world. Instead of seeing the world as a place of chaos and confusion, the world view of God’s people...reflected the mind and purposes of God.

God wants the same thing for us today. The modern and postmodern view is that the world is product of eternal matter – interacting without purpose and direction. We are, in the words of one person...”the product of a long series of singularly beneficial accidents”. If that is so...then there is no ultimate standard in such a world...no meaningful past – no purposeful present -and no hope for the future.

That was not the world that God actually created, nor was it the world that God wanted his people to have. The real world is filled with cohesion, regularity and predictability, nor does it exist for no purpose.

Our lives have meaning, and purpose and direction, all provided by the one who has finished his new creation in Jesus Christ and who calls us from the cares of this world to his eternal rest. May we heed that call and enjoy his blessings forever.

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Tim Alexander is a life-long Christian with a love for languages. He reads his Bible with an eye for getting away from human-made traditions and discovering the pure will of God. He works for a non-profit Christian organization and has had the opportunity to travel and speak in churches around the world.

Tim and his wife live in Beamsville, Ontario, Canada.

A Great Commandment: “You Shall Love Your Neighbour as Yourself”

Written on: December 31, 2022

Article by: Thayer Salisbury

Leviticus 19:9–18

Often, when studying Leviticus, we are looking at laws that ended with the coming of the new covenant through Christ. We still need to study those laws. We need to understand the principles behind the law because those principles often shed light on other matters.

In Leviticus chapter 19 we come to one of the verses Jesus cites when asked about the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:39ff). So, unlike many passages in Leviticus, this is a commandment we are expected to obey.

But we cannot just say, “okay we have to obey this command.” We must first make sure that we understand the command. What is meant here by “love?” There is a lot of confusion about love. The word is used in so many ways. Some people use the word “love” when they really mean “lust.” Some speak of “loving” their favourite food. What is meant by love in this context? By allowing the context to illustrate love in action we should be able to see the meaning.

Help People Help Themselves

Love is seen in making it possible for the poor to help themselves. Verses nine and ten give instruction on how to help the poor:

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19:9–10)

It is not loving to leave the poor in hopeless poverty. But neither is it loving to do everything for them. Work is fundamental to being made in the image of God (Genesis 2:15). We should not take from people the responsibility to work. The instruction is not to just give away food to everyone who may be hungry, but to make it available to those who are capable of harvesting it.

This law recognizes that there are those made poor by circumstances. There are people who are willing to work but have just had unfortunate circumstances. On the other hand, there are those who are poor because of laziness (Proverbs 19:24). This law allowed the poor to maintain some self-respect while being helped. It also protected Israelite society from the danger of encouraging laziness by establishing a giveaway program.

Pay Quickly

Love is seen in paying quickly, especially to the needy. Verse 13 instructs, “You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.”

It has been said that “Justice delayed is often justice denied.” This is the case if payment is delayed. A

person may be counting on that money. It may be needed that very day. This law, as well as Proverbs 3:27–28, forbids the withholding of payment.¹

Favour Neither Rich nor Poor

Love is seen in justice that favours neither the rich nor the poor. Verse 15 instructs, “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour.”

In most places throughout history, the rich have been

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favoured over the poor. But in some places, efforts have been made to reverse this. Occasionally, prejudice may be shown against the rich. That also is wrong. A person is not wrong because he is rich anymore than a person is wrong because he is poor. Abraham and Job were both rich men who were righteous. "The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all" (Proverbs 22:2). Favouritism in court is always unloving. In the long run, it even harms the person that it pretends to help. Breaking down the principle of justice, because we do not like a person (for being rich or for being poor) is bad for the society and hurts everyone eventually.

Avoiding Slander

Love is seen in avoiding slander. In verse 16 we are told, "You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your

neighbour: I am the Lord." Christians should not slander anyone.

We may disagree with our rulers, but we should not repeat idle rumours we hear about them. Instead, we should try to show honour to rulers. The kings and emperors of the first century were often poor rulers. But the early Christians were told to honour them (1 Peter 2:17). Our disagreement with them will be strengthened if we disagree only on those occasions when we must. If we honour them as much as possible, whatever words of criticism we must occasionally speak will be respected. But if we are given to repeating

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slander, we will lose what little influence we might have had.

We might at times have reason to distrust our neighbours. But we should not speak ill of them needlessly or attribute wrongs that we are not sure they have done. Being distrustful of someone does not justify repeating rumours or otherwise harming the person's reputation. In a comment on Psalm 15,² *The Africa Bible Commentary*, states, "In the Israelite community a person's reputation was very important. The righteous do not damage anyone else's reputation by false testimony."³ It is sad that so many, who would not think of damaging their neighbour's property, will destroy the reputation of their neighbour.

Correcting

Leviticus 19 also shows us that love is seen in correcting those who are thinking or doing wrong. Verse 17 states, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbour, lest you incur sin because of him." We are not to just let people do as they please, we are to "reason frankly" with them. The NIV puts it even more strongly, saying "Rebuke your neighbour frankly."

I struggled to learn in primary school. Some teachers just passed me on through without really teaching me. Finally, in grade four, we had a teacher who took the time to understand my problem. He made a plan for how I could begin to learn. It was not an easy plan. He talked with my parents, and they agreed to the plan. Which of my teachers was loving, the ones who just let me go on or the one who showed me the way to learn?

It is not unloving to correct someone who is going wrong. The unloving one is the one who is not brave enough



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to correct the erring. Proverb 13:24 tells us, “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” It is not loving to let our neighbour go on in sin. The loving thing to do is to strive to correct our neighbour.

No Grudge

We should also note that love is seen in not taking personal vengeance or holding a grudge. Verse 18 begins, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people.” It then goes on to say, “but you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Once wrong has been admitted and repented of, do not hold on to resentment. If you cannot literally forget it, at least do not bring it up again.

This is how our Lord would have us treat others (Matthew 7:12). This is how he has dealt with us. He helps us, but still leaves us with tasks to do. He shows favouritism to no one. He does not desire that we go on in sin, so he warns us of the consequences. He corrects us. He does not hold a grudge but forgives if we admit and repent of our sin. This is how we should treat others. This is true love for our neighbour.

Matsapha, Eswatini, Africa

Notes

1 Proverbs 3:27-28 “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbour, ‘Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it’—when you have it with you.”

2 Psalm 15:2-3 “He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbour, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;”

3 *Africa Bible Commentary*, cited from the electronic (Kindle) edition, page 1627.

“After God Spoke...He Spoke”

Written on: December 1, 2022

Article by: Nathan Brown

“**G**od, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they” (Hebrews 1:1–4, NASB95).

Words denoting oral communication occur seventy-three times in Hebrews, proportionately more frequent than any of the other non-narrative books in the New Testament. In almost every case, God speaks something from the Old Testament or, as the author prefers to call it, the “first covenant” (e.g., 8:7). God’s previous revelation provides the author of Hebrews with material for all three components of his message—theological argumentation (e.g., 1:5–14), positive encouragement (e.g., 13:6), and warning (e.g., 12:25). Thus, the inspiration and continuing authority of God’s previous revelation gives the book persuasive power, yet part of what he proves from God’s previous revelation is that it testifies that the *first* covenant is not intended to be His *only* covenant and that the coming covenant will be superior (e.g., 8:8–13). The prologue, quoted above, introduces this topic, and the author returns to it in various ways throughout the book. Notice that, in contrast to many later, the author of Hebrews insists on both the continuity between the parts of God’s revelation and the superiority of the recent one.

The book of Hebrews insists that God’s message to humanity is coherent. According to the prologue, God “spoke” both “long ago to the fathers” (1:1) and “in these last days...to us” (Hebrews 1:2). The author shows that the Old Testament itself points to another covenant beyond itself (e.g., 8:8–13). Indeed, the author points out that the ceremonies of the Mosaic covenant had no meaning without their fulfillment in God’s recent message, in Jesus (e.g., 10:4). Moreover, the Old Testament teems with promises that are not fulfilled within its pages. If God is faithful, as His previous revelation insists (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:9), then the first covenant cannot be the end of the story (cf., e.g., 11:40). Not only were the Jews still waiting for God to fulfil his messianic promises, but the author’s exposition of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3 and 4 shows that the land promise that God had made to Abraham, (one of the three basic promises on which the covenant with him and his descendants depended), had only been fulfilled in a preliminary way: “for if Joshua had given them rest,” David would not have warned of the possibility of not entering God’s rest (4:7–8). The unfulfilled promises of God made it clear that He was not finished talking.

Thus a further word from the Lord, in itself implies, the superiority of the more recent message. God does not speak for no reason. Another message implies that He had



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something important to say that He had not already covered. Moreover, the loose threads from the Old Testament, upon which the author relies to show God's foreshadowing of the new covenant, testify to the superiority of the new covenant which ties them all together.

To remove all doubt, the prologue explicitly contrasts the stages of God's revelation in several respects. God's previous revelation was "long ago to the fathers in the prophets". The subsequent message arrived "in these last days...to us in His Son." Mentioning the "last days" raises the spectre of those promises awaiting fulfillment by those familiar with what

God had said "to the fathers in the prophets" (cf., e.g., Isaiah 2:2). A message directed "to us" is worthy of at least as much attention as one directed "to the fathers." A message that came from God's Son is worthy of more attention than one that came through the prophets, who were His servants (cf., e.g., 1 Kings 14:18).

The kicker, is the element in the first clause that has no equivalent in the second: the author specifies that God's previous message came "in many portions and in many ways." God did not give the entire message of the Old Testament to any one person at one time: Abraham got a piece, Moses, a bigger piece, and each of the prophets received their own portions. It took about a thousand years for what we know as the Old Testament to come together. Likewise, God's message in the Old Testament came "in many ways," i.e., through many means. Sometimes God spoke directly to the prophets and at other times through dreams or visions. By contrast, God's message through His Son came all at one time and in one way. God sent Jesus into the world to

reveal Him. As the apostle John puts it, “Nobody has seen God at any time; the unique God who was in the bosom of the Father has explained Him” (John 1:18). The author of Hebrews does not provide an equivalent for “at many times and in many ways” because there is none: for when God revealed Himself through His Son, it took place all at one time and through one means.

The rest of the prologue consists of a series of four relative clauses modifying the “Son.” These clauses further explain how God’s message in Jesus goes beyond the previous revelation.

The first and fourth clauses speak of Jesus as Heir: Jesus inherited everything, and is as superior to the angels as is the name that He inherited. Maybe someone can enlighten me, but I have not read anywhere in Scripture that an angel inherited anything. Putting the first and fourth relative clauses together then, Jesus is as much superior to an angel as everything is to nothing. He is infinitely superior. The Jews in the first century believed that God used angels as intermediaries when He gave the Law to Moses. (See Acts 7:38 and Hebrews 2:2) Since Jesus is God and superior to angels, his message must also be superior to theirs. The most important messenger implies the most important message.

The remaining relative clauses relate to the person and work of Jesus. They show Him as a representative of God to humanity and of humanity to God, a theme to which I will return (e.g., 3:1). Jesus is clearly divine because He is involved in creating (1:2) and sustaining (1:3) the world. These are things that only God does. Furthermore, He is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature” (1:3). The terms “radiance” and “exact representation” have specific connotations. We see the stars through the radiance of their visible light. Stamped upon each coin is the exact shape of the die which made it. Likewise, Jesus has displayed both the glory and the nature of God on earth so that we can know Him (cf. John 1:18). He has shown us what it is that makes God, Himself. In terms of representing man to God, the prologue also portrays Jesus as “making purification for sins,” i.e., serving as a priest, a theme the author covers extensively later in the book.

To summarize, the prologue of Hebrews asserts both the continuity between the stages of God’s revelation and the superiority of the revelation in Jesus. After God spoke, He spoke again in Jesus. This latter message completed a revelation begun long ago and fully revealed who God is. At the heart of who God is, is His desire to have a relationship with us. This motivated Jesus to offer Himself so that we could have an opportunity to be right with God.

God has spoken. Are we listening by “hold[ing] fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (3:14)?