Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Just last year the Supreme Court in India overturned a State law that banned dance bars. According to the State law, any dance performance in hotels or bars was obscene and immoral and, therefore, illegal. But the Judges of the Supreme Court said, “Standards of morality in a society change with the passage of time.” They also said that “a particular activity, which was treated as immoral a few decades ago, may not be now as societal norms keep changing with time.”

And it is this way of thinking about morality that has to led to things like abortion, same-sex marriage, prostitution, and euthanasia, things that were all uniformly rejected as wrong 50 years ago, now viewed as OK in many countries around the world, including New Zealand.

So is that it? Is morality just about popular opinion? Could it be that in another 10 years, if enough people agree, things like polygamy or bestiality or paedophilia will be OK? And I know that even the thought of those things being thought of as OK will shock most of us, but let’s not forget that all of the things that I mentioned earlier would have shocked our grandparents. And there are groups and persons today who argue that things like polygamy or bestiality or paedophilia are OK.

Well, today we begin the second half of the Book of Leviticus. And as I explained last week, the first half of the Book is about the **Way** **to** God – the way of blood sacrifice. And the sacrifices of Leviticus pointed forward to the Once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Well, the second half of the Book is about the **Walk** **with** God. This is how those that God had made holy were to live; this is the holy lifestyle that marked them out as different than the people of the surrounding nations.

And as we read in the Westminster Confession chapter earlier, God’s law includes what we call **ceremonial** laws, **civil** laws, and His **moral** law. And the first half of Leviticus is mostly ceremonial law. And because Christ came and offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice for sins, we do not need to offer those sacrifices and perform those ceremonies anymore. And we will encounter more ceremonial law in the second half of the book, but the concern of the next few chapters is mainly civil law and moral law.

* **Civil** law, as we read in the Westminster Confession of Faith, is the legal system of Old Testament Israel. We are not bound by that law today, except by way of general principle. And we will say more about that next week, God willing.
* But with chapters 18-19, we are going to focus on the **moral** law. And the moral law is basically the 10 Commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. It *was* for Israel and it *is* for us today; everyone is under obligation to obey God’s moral law. It is God’s unchanging standard of morality. And we have noted before that God made the permanence and universal obligation to keep this law very obvious by writing the 10 Commandments with His own finger, on tablets of stone, and commanding that they be kept in the Ark of the Covenant.

And take a look at **the opening words of chapter 18**: “*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God*.” And then in verse 3 there is a reference to “*Egypt*.” And I am pretty sure most of you will know how the 10 Commandments begin: “*And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt*.” So just those opening words made it very clear that the people of Israel were supposed to connect the 10 Commandments with what the Lord was saying here.

So what we are going to do today is three things – we will first of all quickly see each of **the 10 Commandments in the chapters before us**, then we will think about **the 10 Commandments in the New Testament**, and we will end with **one story from the New Testament, which reveals how the moral law points us to Christ, even as we strive to obey it**.

1. So first of all, let’s see **each of the 10 Commandments in Leviticus 18-19**.
   1. The First Commandment is “*You shall have no other gods before me*.”
      1. And last week, from **17:7**, we saw the people of Israel being told to no longer worship “*goat demons*.” And in **18:21**, God specifically warned the people not to offer their children to the Canaanite god, Molech. And in **19:31**, they were told, “*Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them. I am the Lord your God*.” And this command is repeated, twice, also in **chapter 20**. God’s people were to worship Him alone; any attempt to communicate with spirits or with the dead was dabbling in the worship of false gods or the devil.
   2. The Second Commandment is “*You shall not make for yourself a carved image … you shall not bow down to them or worship them*.”
      1. And **19:4** says, “*Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal*. *I am the Lord your God*.”
   3. The Third Commandment is *“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain*.”
      1. And **19:12** says, “*You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD*.” God’s name was above every name. It was to be used for praise and prayer and blessing, carefully and reverently, not for curse or just spoken carelessly.
   4. The Fourth commandment is “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*.”
      1. And **19:3** says, “*And you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God*,” and **19:30** says, “*You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD*.” Sabbath observance was one way that would mark out the Lord’s people.
   5. The Fifth Commandment is “*Honour your father and your mother*.”
      1. And **19:3** says, “*Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father*.”And 19:32 says, “*You shall stand up before the gray head and honour the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD*.” So not just parents were to be honoured but all of the elderly and those in authority.
   6. The Sixth Commandment is “*You shall not murder*.”
      1. And **19:14** says, “*You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD*.” **19:16-18** says, “*You shall not stand up against the life of your neighbour … You shall not hate your brother in your heart … You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD*.” It was wrong to *endanger* your neighbour’s life, it was wrong to *take* your neighbour’s life, and it was wrong even to *hate* your neighbour.
   7. The Seventh Commandment is “*You shall not commit adultery*.”
      1. And **Chapter 18** begins with a list of all the people that it was wrong to uncover the nakedness of, which simply means to have sexual relations with. Verse 6 says, “*None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD*. So this was the Lord explaining who was ‘off limits,’ sexually.
      2. And in **verse 20** it is specifically adultery in view as lying sexually with your neighbour’s wife is forbidden.
      3. And in terms of the today’s same-sex debate, **verse 22** says, “*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination*.”
      4. And then in the next verse, bestiality is forbidden as a perversion. And just as a side note, just this week a well-known evangelical minister apologized for a sermon he preached back in 2004 that had upset the LGBT community. In the sermon he said if we allow same-sex marriage now, will we allow incest or bestiality somewhere down the road? And he apologized for linking homosexuality with incest and bestiality. But **God links them** here in Leviticus 18! And He uses the language of abomination with each of these sins. Much of society may view it as acceptable but God views it as repugnant and unnatural, and something He will judge if there is no repentance.
      5. But continuing on, in **19:29**, prostitution was also forbidden.
      6. Again, the people of Israel were about to enter Canaan, where anything and everything sexual was OK. **18:24** says, “*Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants*.” And so the Lord said, “*Everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people*.”
   8. The Eighth Commandment is “*You shall not steal*.”
      1. And so, on the positive side, from 19:9, farmers were commanded to make some of their crops available so the poor had something to eat. And on the negative side, **19:11** says, “*You shall not steal*.” And **19:13** says, “*You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning*.” And **verse 35** is about honest prices in business.
   9. The Ninth Commandment is “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour*.”
      1. **19:11** says, “*You shall not lie to one another*.” And **verse 15** is about honesty and justice in the courtroom, and **verse 16** forbids slander, which is telling untruths to harm someone’s reputation.
   10. The Tenth Commandment is “*You shall not covet … anything that is your neighbour's*.”
       1. And you will remember that this commandment begins with, “*You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife*” and also includes “*his ox or his donkey*.” So coveting lies behind what has already been said about adultery and stealing; those sins began with a covetous heart. And so, even though we don’t find an explicit warning not to covet in chapters 18-19, it is there!
2. So there you have it, each of the 10 Commandments on display in Leviticus 18-19. And again and again in these chapters, God said to the people, Do not do as the inhabitants of the land did. Keep all of my statutes and rules. And it is all summed up by **19:2**, “*You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy*.” Well, as we switch our attention next to **the 10 COmmandments in the New Testament**, we find the same words:
   1. Earlier we read **1 Peter** **1:15**: “*As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*.”
   2. And having celebrated salvation in Christ, Peter went on to say, as “*a holy nation … keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that … they may see your good deeds*.” In other words, don’t behave like the people around you, be different; obey my commandments; be holy.
   3. And Jesus Himself was very clear about the moral law; in **Matthew 5:17** He said, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven*.”
   4. And so, from time to time we do a **responsive reading** in our morning services. And I have one called the 10 Commandments in the New Testament, one called the 10 Commandments in the Gospels, and one called the 10 Commandments in the Epistles. And if you would like a copy of each of those documents, so you can look up the references, let me know and I will be happy to get a copy to you. I am sure that Google will provide you with them also. But each commandment is repeated in the same or similar words in the New Testament.
   5. And we should not forget that when asked which was the great commandment of the Law, Jesus summarized the moral law by saying, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself*.” And where did He get that second commandment from? Leviticus 19:18!
3. So we find the 10 commandments or the moral law also in the New Testament. And as our Westminster Confession of faith puts it, “In the Gospel, Christ in no way dissolves this obligation, but greatly strengthens it.” And that brings us, thirdly and lastly, to one conversation in the Gospels that helps us see how the moral law points us to Christ even as we strive to obey it. So **the 10 Commandments and the Gospel**.
   1. And we find a record of the conversation in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And I am borrowing parts of all three accounts, so just listen along. There we read, “And behold, a man came up to [Jesus], saying, "Good Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? No one is good except God alone. "”
      1. Now, let’s pause there for a moment. This man called Jesus, “*Good Teacher*.” He recognized that Jesus obeyed God’s commandments. And then Jesus said to him that only God is good. In **Psalm 14** it says of all human beings, “*There is none righteous, no, not one … no one does good, not even one*.” **Ecclesiastes 7:20** says, “*Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins*.” As those who are just human, we cannot keep God’s law perfectly, because we have a sinful nature. But Jesus was man and God, so He did not have a sinful nature. And this is what Jesus was implying when He said, only God is good.
   2. But to further test the young man and to point the young man to Himself as the Saviour He needed, Jesus said, “*If you would enter life, keep the commandments*.” And then He listed several of the 10 Commandments. And the deluded young man said, “*All these I have kept. What do I still lack?*”
      1. And I think we can be sure that the young man had tried his absolute best to keep God’s commandments. And we can admire his zeal. And perhaps, with the commandments that Jesus had listed, the man had kept them in terms of their outward and obvious observance.
      2. But there was one commandment that Jesus did not include in His list – “*You shall not covet*,” because He knew what was in the young man’s heart. So that is the commandment He honed on when He said, “*If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me*.”
      3. And then we read, “*When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions*.”
      4. Now, this is not to say that the young man only had to work on coveting. This man loved money more than he loved God or his neighbour. So even just that one commandment made him guilty of breaking the whole law.And this is exactly what **James 2:10** says, “*Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it*.” This man was not a law-keeper, but a law-breaker.
   3. And by implication, Jesus had said to the young man, and He says to us today, I am good because I am God. I have *done* what you cannot do. I have *kept* what you cannot keep. And then Jesus also said to the young man, and He says to us today, “*Come, follow me*.”

You see, God gave humanity His moral law so that we might know how to live. It is the unchanging standard for all of human society. But His law also exposes our inability and our guilt. And that is why He also gave us the Gospel to point us to Jesus in whom we may have the forgiveness of our sins. And when we believe in Him, God puts the perfection of Jesus into our ‘spiritual bank accounts.’ When He looks at us, He sees the obedience of Jesus!

And if we believe that in Jesus our sins are forgiven, then we have **the right motivation** to obey the moral law – thankfulness! I cannot keep God’s law perfectly; I am a wretched sinner. But Christ has kept God’s law for me and by Christ’s blood, my sins are washed away! Therefore, because I am holy *in Christ*, I shall pursue a holy lifestyle; I shall strive to do what pleases the Lord. And so, I shall not worship other gods, or make idols, or blaspheme, and I shall observe the Lord’s Day, and honour my father and mother, and I shall not murder or commit adultery or steal or lie or covet.

Praise God for the moral law and for the gospel of salvation in Christ. Amen.