

Set Futures  
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Leviticus 26:3-16,40-45

Opening: Let's take a poll by show of hands. **Which spouse is the tougher disciplinarian with your kids? Which one is the softy who tends to cut them slack? What are the dangers of being too permissive? What are the dangers of being too strict? As your kids have grown older, has it been easier or harder to let them learn from their mistakes? Why?**

We're told that shortly before he died, the twentieth century comedian W.C. Fields was found sitting in the garden of a sanitarium thumbing through a Bible. His friend was surprised at the sight based on the way Fields had lived his life. When he asked why, Fields replied, *"I'm looking for loopholes."*

When it comes to obeying God's commandments and direction people have been looking for "loopholes" for centuries. That's what led the Israelites to turn to the worship of carved idols and later to make keeping their own version of the "rules" an idolatry of sorts as well.

One thing we've learned over and over again in the study of Leviticus is that God told His people: "I am holy, so YOU are to be holy." (Lev. 20:26) The problem is that ever since Adam and Eve committed the first sin, people have been "looking for loopholes" to get around being obedient to how God instructed us to live. Though His guidance and commandments are for our own good, we still want to go our own way often with tragic consequences.

In this next to last chapter of Leviticus God did what any loving parent should do. He set the boundaries and laid out the expectations of what brings His blessing and what causes His discipline.

Big Idea: God promises to bless those who are faithful to Him and discipline those who are not. Put another way, God knows what's best for us and He is not a "permissive" or "passive" parent who will just let us live dangerously feeling no consequences.

Remember, God didn't give His grace SO we can mess up; His grace is there for WHEN we mess up even though we're trying to honor Him.

Leviticus 26:3–16 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup>"If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, <sup>4</sup>then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. <sup>5</sup>Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And

you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. <sup>6</sup> I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. <sup>7</sup> You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. <sup>8</sup> Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. <sup>9</sup> I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. <sup>10</sup> You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. <sup>11</sup> I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. <sup>12</sup> And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. <sup>13</sup> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

- In verses three through ten God clearly outlined the cause and effect relationship of obeying his “statutes” and “commandments.”
- It was an “IF, THEN” outline. If they obeyed what He told them, THEN certain things would happen. Look at verses three through ten: **What kinds of blessings do we see for living in obedience? Why were these promised blessings important to those people at that time?**
- Notice that God the Father promised to bless them in specific ways based on their circumstances while taking possession of the Promised Land. He didn’t promise them gold and silver or luxury and comfort. In fact, He didn’t say they could slack off their farming or avoid fighting their enemies.
- Verses eleven and twelve: **What did God promise?**
- Verse thirteen: In the Old Testament God had to remind the Israelites over and over again that He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. You’d think they wouldn’t forget that! **How has He delivered us today (Rom. 6:22?) What did He mean by “walk erect?” How does He do that for us?**

Life Application Study Bible:

*“Imagine the joy of a slave set free. God took the children of Israel out of bitter slavery and gave them freedom and dignity. We, too, are set free when we accept Christ’s payment that redeems us from sin’s slavery. We no longer need to be bogged down in shame over our past sins; we can walk with dignity because God has forgiven us and forgotten them. But just as the Israelites were still in danger of returning to a slave mentality, we need to beware of the temptation to return to our former sinful patterns.”<sup>ii</sup>*

- God still operates in this same way with us today. He doesn’t promise a life of leisure if we follow Christ, but He DOES promise to meet every need and be present with us giving us strength we don’t possess on our own. He also delivers us from slavery to sin through Jesus’ death on the cross.
- What if they DIDN’T follow God in obedience? Let’s see that beginning in verse 14:

<sup>14</sup> “But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, <sup>15</sup> if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, <sup>16</sup> then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

- **In verse sixteen, what were the consequences for disobedience?**  
We’re not going to go through 17-39 in detail, but let’s just look over it for some more examples of consequences.
- **What are some modern day consequences that God’s people might experience for refusing to walk in obedience to His commandments?**
- **What do you think motivates a person more --- a blessing or a warning? Can you have one without the other? Explain. How is facing hardship as discipline an act of God’s mercy?**
- Caution: We need to be careful not to draw the conclusion that trials in the life of a follower of Christ are an indication of God’s discipline.
- **How can we discern whether hardship might be discipline or simply circumstances in a fallen world?**

Life Application Study Bible:

*“When calamity strikes us, we may not know the reason. It may be (1) the result of our own disobedience, (2) the result of someone else’s sin, or (3) the result of natural disaster. Because we don’t know, we should search our hearts and be sure we are at peace with God. His Spirit, like a great searchlight, will reveal those areas we need to deal with. Because calamity is not always the result of wrongdoing, we must guard against assigning or accepting blame for every tragedy we encounter. Misplaced guilt is one of Satan’s favorite weapons against believers.”<sup>iii</sup>*

- Here’s the great news: Even though God’s people messed up and were disobedient, He made a way for them to make things right with Him.

Leviticus 26:40–45 (ESV)

<sup>40</sup> “But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, <sup>41</sup> so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies—if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, <sup>42</sup> then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. <sup>43</sup> But the land shall be abandoned by them and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my rules and their soul abhorred my statutes. <sup>44</sup> Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. <sup>45</sup> But I will for their sake

remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord.”

- Our God is a covenant-keeping God. Though he ultimately had to let the Israelites feel the consequences of their idol worship and disobedience to His commands, in these verses He gives another IF/THEN statement.
- “IF they will confess” their sins and if their “uncircumcised heart” is humbled, THEN “I will remember my covenant” with Jacob and Abraham.
- “Uncircumcised heart” is a strange expression. Genesis 17:11 tells us that the physical circumcision of a male Jew was a sign of God’s covenant with them. A Jewish man in that day could point to this physical evidence that he was a man of God.
- *“[An uncircumcised heart] means that although the Israelites are circumcised in the flesh, their hearts are actually like the hearts of the pagan peoples.”<sup>v</sup>*
- That’s a danger we have today. If someone professes to be a Christian but their heart has never undergone a change, they may look like a Christian on the outside and yet be just like a pagan on the inside.
- Remember that verse David wrote in Psalm 51:17 (ESV) <sup>17</sup> *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- God promises to bless those who are faithful to Him and discipline those who are not.
- He knows what’s best for us and He is not a “permissive” or “passive” parent who will just let us live dangerously feeling no consequences.

Warren Wiersbe summarized Leviticus 26 this way:

*“The people of Israel were but children in their faith (Gal. 4:1–7), and you teach children primarily through rewards and punishments. You can’t give children lectures on ethics and expect them to understand, but you can promise to reward them if they obey and punish them if they disobey. This approach will protect them from harming themselves, and it will give them time to grow older and better understand why obedience is the key to a happy life. Children must gradually learn that both commandments and punishments are expressions of love for their own good.”<sup>v</sup>*

- Remember, some of God’s greatest blessings are from the bad things we avoided rather than what we gained by living in obedience to Him.
- Even if we try our best, from time to time we will slip into disobedience and sin. Our hope is in the fact that God offers forgiveness if we’ll turn to Him in repentance.

- At the same time, we need to remember that God didn't give His grace SO we can mess up; His grace is there for WHEN we mess up even though we're trying to honor Him.
- We also need to remember not every trial is a sign of disobedience or sin in our lives. When we experience problems we need to ask God if there's anything in our lives we need to confess and ask forgiveness for.
- Bottom line of this lesson: We have a loving Heavenly Father that wants only the best for us. We can have His best by obeying His commands. If we don't, He promises to correct us, forgive us, and restore us because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

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<sup>i</sup> 1966 December 11, Los Angeles Times W.C. Fields—The Bubble Still Hasn't Burst by John C. West, Quote Page B7, Column 4, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>ii</sup> Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 135712-135715). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iv</sup> Crossway Bibles. ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 25606-25607). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

<sup>v</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Holy* (p. 137). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.