

Separation from Evil

Deuteronomy 22-23

I began last week's sermon by asking the question, "What do we do with this chapter? What do we do with these passages of the Old Testament that seem so...outdated? What do we do with these Old Testament laws that not only seem irrelevant to us today, but actually come across as offensive?"

To answer those questions, let me emphasize again, as I did last week, the distinction between the moral law, the ceremonial law, and the civil law in the Old Testament. The moral law abides forever, and applies to us today just as it always has. That moral law is summarized in a comprehensive way by the ten commandments. Commandments against lying, stealing, and committing adultery, among other things. Then there are obvious ceremonial laws, law of the Old Testament priests, laws of the sacrifices required by God before Jesus came to sacrifice himself once for all. The obligation of those ceremonial laws ended with the coming of Jesus. But then we see the civil laws for the nation of Israel as a nation. What do we do with them?

Remember that in the Old Testament the church and the state were one and the same. So the nation of Israel, as a nation, was exactly the same as the covenant people of God. The nation of God was the nation of Israel. The King of Israel sat upon the throne of God. And to be a member of the nation of God's people, to be one of God's covenant people, you had to be a citizen of the nation of Israel. In that context, there are a number of laws in the Old Testament that apply to that Old Testament nation, that civil nation, that no longer abide since that nation no longer exists. In other words, when the nation of Israel ceased to exist, when it was destroyed as it was by the Roman army in 70 AD, the civil laws of that nation expired with the nation.

And so now, in the New Testament, that so-called nation of God's people is no longer a civil or political nation at all. But it is the church. That was the great transformation brought about by the incarnation of Jesus as the second person of the trinity. The point is that with that change from the civil nation of Israel being the kingdom of God to the church being the kingdom of God, the civil law expired. But what remains are the general principles of those laws as they would be applied in the context of the church. That is our context again this morning. Again most focus will be rather general, general principles that would still be meaningful for us as Christians today, even though the actual, specific regulation of the law is no longer applicable.

Actually, the general principles aren't too hard to articulate, because we see much of that done in the New Testament. Remember when asked that trick question about which was the most important law? And the lawyer asking the question was trying to provoke an argument, and to test Jesus, hoping he would say something that would cause conflict or division among his hearers. Jesus gave such a wise answer.

Mat. 22:37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

It is the second of those two great commandments that I am identifying this morning as a general principle of all the regulations we read in Deuteronomy 22.

I. THE LAW OF LOVE FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR.

Those specific words came from the book of Leviticus, not Deuteronomy, but we have some examples here. First,

A. Respect for the property of others.

22:1-4

We get a similar idea in,
23:24-25

Practical. Personal. Easy to understand. Easy to apply. It is a matter of love. If your neighbor's animal needs help, then help him out. Or if your neighbor loses something, return it to him. It is called kindness. And that kindness is very much an ongoing obligation of God's people.

Col. 3:12 "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering..."

Kindness is a fruit of the spirit, the work of God the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian.

Gal. 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control."

In terms of the moral law, the ten commandments, this whole concept of respect for the property of others falls under the 8th commandment, you shall not steal. As with all of God's laws, it is not simply the negative prohibition that the law addresses, but the positive requirement. Honor and respect the personal property that belongs to others. Not simply don't steal, but as Paul expresses in,

Eph. 4:28 "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."

Simply put, it is a mark of true Christian faith and life to exercise this sort of love for your neighbor, honoring their private

property. That is why the economic systems of communism and socialism are so destructive, because as a matter of public policy, they violate this very principle. My encouragement, personally, though, is that you see just how practical this law is, and that you seek to apply it to all the situations of your own life. Respect for the property of others.

Then,

B. Respect for sexual identity.

Again, general principle, the idea is that we as human beings are created in God's image, and we are created male and female. God made us male and female, and though by nature that used to be a clearly understood principle, it needs to be emphasized today, a day in which there really is no respect for sexual identity. The movement of our culture is to blur that distinction, if not to make it meaningless altogether.

But we read,
22:5

I believe Paul is applying that same principle in 1 Corinthians 7, when he identifies that distinction between male and female. It is a passage which I believe does require a head covering for a woman because God has made men and woman to be and to look distinct by nature. So he writes,

1 Cor. 7:13 "Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? 15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering."

Without specifying the details of exact hair length, I believe this principle is what Paul is emphasizing. Men and women are distinct according to their gender, and we ought to honor and

respect that.

Then a third principle of loving your neighbor, one which extends beyond the realm of human beings to all creatures. God's law concerning our love for one another even provides for the benefit and well-being of the other living creatures which God has made.

22:6-7

And then a fourth example of this love,

D. Protecting others from danger.

Again, the general principle of this Old Testament law is still valid. The general idea is still embedded in the command to love one another.

22:8

Houses in those days had flat roofs, and a guardrail of some kind was to be built to protect others from danger. That's part of the way in which we show our love to others! Do what you can to protect others from danger. And, I might add, that is a significant argument in the decision to wear a mask in crowded public places these days.

That's the first general principle. Love your neighbor. The second one we find here is,

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE.

Now, you get can into a lot of trouble trying to make sense of these verses if you want to apply them today, and if you presuppose that what they are requiring is actually something horribly offensive and even abuse to women. But I want you to recognize that, in principle, there is actually protective offered here to women. Specifically,

A. The principle of protecting a woman against malicious accusations and abuse.

Now, again, on the surface, this practice seems so utterly demeaning.

22:13-19

I believe the emphasis there is to restrain a man from making such a false accusation in the first place. The punishment imposed him was severe, and it was intended to be a deterrent. A man who made a false accusation was to be punished, and he was to be fined. The fine was actually double what he would have had to pay as a bride price to get married in the first place.

I'm not advocating that we require such proof and evidence to be made today, especially in public. But I am suggesting that this provision in God's law was to restrain the maliciousness of a man who for whatever reason refused to continue to love his wife and made a false accusation against her as the grounds to put her away. He is forbidden to do so, and punished severely if he does.

The principle of the sanctity of marriage even more clearly protects the woman against abuse. Sexual abuse.

v.25-27

Such abuse is horrific. And God's people are not to tolerate it. And a woman abused is to be recognized as a victim. Her abuser is to be punished. Only in that way is the honor of the marital relationship honored and preserved. And that is the overall principle. I'll skip over the additional details here simply to emphasize that great point. That positive point, as we read in,

Heb. 13:4 "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

Marriage is honorable. The next phrase refers to the marriage

bed, a Greek word from which we get the English word coitus. It is a gentle and honorable reference to the marital relationship, the relationship of a husband and a wife. And that relationship is undefiled. It is holy. It is sacred, that is set apart. It is to be honored, to be respected. To be given glory.

Prov. 30:18 “There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Yes, four which I do not understand: 19 The way of an eagle in the air, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the midst of the sea, And the way of a man with a maiden.”

The writer just marvels at these gloriously unexplainable things, marveling in their glory. The way of a man with a maiden. The marriage bed is holy. That’s the principle. And I don’t need to convince how much we need to proclaim and reclaim that principle today, for everything to do with the marital intercourse has been dirty, profane, vulgar. Even the language used to describe it, and I am intentionally using the careful and appropriate language of Scripture to describe that which should be held in great honor not treated with disgusting vulgarity.

Paul puts it this way.

1 Cor. 6:18 “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

The second, related principle with regard to the sanctity of marriage is,

B. The principle of being separate from the world in personal conduct.

So, in the situation we have already looked at, if there is impurity, that is another story altogether, as the sanctity of marriage requires purity. But notice in these verses, despite what you read in verses 20-21, the punishment and the sanctions against sexual immorality were applied equally to the man and to the woman.

Deut. 22:22

Similarly, v.23-24

That’s the broad principle. “So you shall put away the evil from among you.” We read the same thing in verse 21 and verse 22. And we read the same thing in,

1 Cor. 5:1 “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you...6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.”

Paul then concludes,

1 Cor. 5:13 “Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

Somehow, the church today must reclaim the glory of this idea, that the marriage of a man and a women is set apart from all other human relationships. And that the freedom and blessing God gives to that marriage relationship, in every way, is

honorable. It is holy. It is good. It is pure. It is right. And everything that contradicts that glory is to be rejected. “Therefore glorify God in your body.” That’s the overriding principle here.

Love your neighbor. Promote the sanctity of marriage. Then the third principle, somewhat more broad.

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SANCTITY OF OUR COVENANT COMMUNITY.

That is how I summarize the whole of chapter 23, and without being so tedious as to plow through every verse in detail, let’s look at something of the big picture of this chapter. Beginning with the emphasis on the priority of God’s people in meeting together in what can be called the sacred assembly. The idea is,

A. Protecting the privilege of gathering together as God’s people.

Now, in the New Covenant, unbelievers are welcome to join us when we worship. We need to invite them, so they can observe our devotion to God. But the worship of God itself is ours, as the covenant community. It is only for Christians, which we emphasize especially with the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. It is only for believers!

That idea was much more externally enforced in the Old Covenant, so there were specific provisions for those who were determined to be unclean. Unfit to enter the presence of God. That is plain in verses 1-2, referring to those who were mutilated. Then there were national exclusions in verses 3-4, some nations were the enemies of God’s people so they were excluded.

In verses 7-8 we see a good measure of God’s grace, where the Edomites and Egyptians were to be included. And, of course, from verse 5, God turned Balaam’s curse into a blessing for his people.

The point is that the assembly of God’s people is a sacred assembly. It is a holy assembly. And we are called to that same assembly today. It’s now call the church! But the principle is the same,

Heb. 10:24 “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Let me note as well that the holiness of God’s people, the separateness of God’s people from the world, is the idea behind the particular regulations about mixing things together, such as we read in,

22:9-12

Obviously, those specific regulations are not longer valid, but the broader principle is, that God’s people are to show themselves separate and distinct from the world. That is to say, holy. In the language of the New Testament,

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

We see that principle here in Deuteronomy as well.

B. Promoting the holiness of God’s people.

23:9-14

The idea is the same as what we looked at with reference to marriage.

v.14

And, 1 Cor. 5:13 “Therefore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”

Holy means to be set apart, and we are to be set apart by our conduct and our character. As Peter puts it,

1 Peter 2:1 “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. 4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Let’s look at two final examples of this principle of the sanctity of our covenant community, again with a focus on how that applies to all of us today.

C. Preserving the integrity of God’s people in relationship to one another.

And I added in parenthesis in my outline, no hypocrisy. That’s what I mean by integrity. The absence of hypocrisy.

23:15-20

Again, those are all ways in which God’s people reflect the integrity of their hearts. In our inter-personal relationships. With a final example in terms of taking vows and keeping your word. What we see here in this chapter is,

D. Encouraging the faithfulness of God’s people to keep their word.

23:21-23

You get the idea, don’t you? If you promise to do something, do it! If you make a commitment, keep it. That’s integrity. And that practice is necessary for us even today as a covenant community of God’s people.

Now, let me conclude by saying this, if you hear all these principles and laws and forget that the foundation of everything here is God’s promise to be the God of his people, then you have missed the whole point. This is not a series of principles for successful living. These are nothing but the outworking of the work of God’s grace in salvation. These people in Deuteronomy were the nation of God’s people whom he had redeemed from the land of slavery. And all of the applications of these principles to us must be seen in that same light. None of these things will enable you to earn your salvation. None of these things will enable you to gain entrance into heaven.

Rather, as those who have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, these principles as they apply to us are the way in which we who have been saved by grace might show forth our love to God for the great salvation with which we have been saved. And as those who are thus redeemed in Christ, they show us how we might love one another, together in Christ.

So what is the greatest commandment?

Mat. 22:37 “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”