

Message #6

Numbers 5:1-31

If we were to poll Christianity and ask them to list the attributes of God in order of importance, I am sure at the top of the list would be God's love. I am certain that this would rank high on the list of God's attributes. **But the truth is the one attribute that the Bible actually mentions the most is God's Holiness, not God's love.**

When Isaiah was taken to the throne of God and saw God high and lifted up, the angels were not crying out "Love, Love, Love," they were crying "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Is. 6:3). When the Apostle John was taken up into heaven to see the throne of God, the four living Creatures were not crying "Love, Love, Love," but "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD God the Almighty" (Rev. 4:8).

God is a holy God and if He is going to bless His people, He demands they be holy. This point was clearly something God wanted Israel to understand as they were about to pack up and head to the Promised Land. **God wanted His people to realize if you want My blessings and My powerful presence, you must be clean.** This is not a nice little suggestion; this is a demand of God. This point is true regardless of the dispensation.

BEFORE GOD WOULD LEAD HIS PEOPLE FORWARD TO GREAT BLESSINGS, HE REVEALED TO HIS PEOPLE THAT THEY WERE TO BE PURE AND HOLY AND WERE TO REMOVE IMPURE THINGS FROM THEIR MIDST AND LIVES.

Now there is a key word that shows up several times in Numbers 5 and that word is "defile" (5:3, 13, 14, 20, 27, 29). The Hebrew word (*ta may*) is one that refers to something that is unclean, polluted and impure (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 322). God says if you want Me to lead you and bless you, you cannot be unclean, polluted and impure. You must get away from those things. **Being unclean is just the opposite of being clean and holy. God cannot and will not bless that which is contrary to Him. He is Holy and Pure and He will bless those who are holy and pure.**

Being clean in God's sight had much more to do than just personal hygiene. For Israel to be clean they had to eat the right food; they had to wear the right clothes; they had to conduct themselves the right way privately and publicly. Unclean people were put out of the camp until they conformed to the ceremonial clean requirements.

Now we in the church certainly may apply a principle and that is this—in order to be clean we must govern ourselves privately and publicly in ways God deems as right.

Now there are three specific kinds of defilement described in this chapter and a way to deal with the defilement, which if followed, will lead to the blessings of God:

**HOLY REGULATION #1 – Cleanliness regulations concerning the male and female leper.
5:1-4**

In O.T. times, leprosy was a dreaded infectious disease that made the infected person not only sick but completely unclean. In fact, lepers had to live outside the camp and if anyone approached them they had to publicly cry out “unclean, unclean” (Lev. 13). If God gave a cleansing cure for the leper, he had to go through a very specific purification process just as God prescribed in order to become clean.

Now one reason why God demanded they be put out of the camp is so that they do not infect others with their disease.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, he completely disregarded the laws of uncleanness and leprosy and actually touched lepers (Luke 5:12-15) and He permitted lepers to touch Him (Luke 8:43-48). **The reason for this is He is the One who can take away the terrible disease of our sin (I Pet. 2:24; Is. 53:4-6). Jesus Christ is the cure.**

Now leprosy is often a metaphorical picture of sin and the truth is we have all been infected by sin. We all need a sin cleansing. That sin cleansing is found in one Person, Jesus Christ. The point here is that God will not fellowship and bless people who have this disease and do nothing about it. God dwells with holy people. God dwells with clean people. So any unclean person needed to be removed from the fellowship if God were to bless the fellowship (I Cor. 5).

This is exactly why Paul said in II Corinthians 7:1, “let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” When we sin, we need to go to God and confess it and get clean of it and get rid of it. God wants His people clean and pure. He will not pour out His blessings on those who are not clean. That is the point for Israel and for us.

**HOLY REGULATION #2 – Cleanliness Regulation concerning the restitution from sin.
5:5-10**

When God’s people sin against another person, so that they bring loss against the person, they need to make it right or God will not bless them. It is not enough at times, just to say I am sorry.

Now the specific issue here was someone sinned against someone else and apparently that sin resulted in the other person suffering some loss. They needed to admit the wrong and seek to make restitution for the wrong.

There are consequences to sin. Sometimes there needs to be restitution (Lev. 6:1-7; 7:1-10). The person who had done the wrong needed to confess it and make it right monetarily and add 20%. This certainly would teach His people that there is a costliness to sin.

God was about to take His people to the Promised Land and to great blessings and He could not and would not do that if His people were at odds with each other. They needed to make things right.

Now one thing that was added to this was that if the one wrong died. If the person died before the matter was made right, then the new law demanded that this be confessed to a priest and a 20 percent loss tax be given by the offender. There was a seriousness to sin against each other.

Israel was getting ready to go into the Promised Land and confront many enemies and if they expected victory against enemies, they could not have unresolved issues that could affect the unity when in conflict.

**HOLY REGULATION #3 – Cleanliness Regulation concerning unfaithfulness in marriage.
5:11-31**

Now I want to make a grammatical observation before tackling this. Chapter 5 begins with the word “Then the LORD spoke to Moses.” So this data comes from God. Second, it is certainly possible that the threat of sexual immorality would occur when the men were at work, working on matters pertaining to the tabernacle. We have just seen that the men were to guard the tabernacle and care for it and put it up and take it down. This would require that they would be away from home. Furthermore, once they got into the Promised Land, many of the men would need to fight battles to take the land and that would mean they would be gone from home a while. It is in this context that this matter is addressed.

Sexual immorality is a serious threat to God blessing His people in any dispensation. Fool around with immoral things and God will not bless one ever. In fact, when Paul warned the church and referred to the events found in the book of Numbers, he specifically brought up sexual immorality (I Cor. 10:8). Sexual immorality is a God blessing killer.

If one was married and was unfaithful, it was a capital offense. In other words, you could get the death penalty if this sin were discovered. Both the adulterer and the adulteress could be stoned to death (Deut. 22:22-24).

Now when it comes to sexual and immoral sins, most of the time it is done in secret and people think no one sees. Of course, God always sees and God always knows. The problem is, however, unless you have an eyewitness, immoral sins are hard to prove.

In the case of an unfaithful wife, if a man were gone, he would have a hard time proving she had been unfaithful. He may have suspicions, but he would have a difficult time proving it.

So God introduced a new legal way for Israel by which the husband could know whether or not his wife was faithful and strangely enough, according to verse 14, it started with jealousy. It is called here “a spirit of jealousy.”

That would indicate that jealousy can take over a person’s mind as a controlling force. In the Bible there are different things that can dominate a person: 1) There is a spirit of wisdom and understanding (Is. 11:2; Eph. 1:17); 2) There is a spirit of harlotry (Hos. 4:12); 3) There is a spirit of meekness (Gal. 6:1); 4) There is a spirit of stupor (Rom. 11:8). So there are all kinds of things that can dominate a mind and control a person.

In Hebrew, there is one key word used for jealous or jealousy and it is the word qanah. This word covers the concepts of jealousy, envy, to burn with an indignant zeal because of jealousy (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 734-735).

Now jealousy is a horrible sin. A jealous person can go out of their minds. Proverbs 6:34 says, “jealousy enrages a man.” Both men and women can become insanely jealous and in Galatians, Paul links this flesh sin in the same category as sorcery, immorality and drunkenness (Gal. 5:19-21).

What is being discussed here is apparently not that type of evil, sinful jealousy. We know that God is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5). This is a suspicious jealousy that suspects that the wife was being unfaithful. Apparently God would put it within the husband to suspect that the wife was unfaithful to him and He came up with a way the matter could be solved or proved or resolved.

Now sometimes suspicious jealousy is an insane sin but sometimes the suspicion is a reality. Sexual immorality was an abominable sin (Lev. 18:20, 24-29) and God would not bless His people involved in it.

God came up with a test to prove whether or not this sin had been committed in secret. What is in this text are two possibilities: 1) The husband suspects the wife of being unfaithful to him, which she obviously doesn't admit and it is true; 2) The husband suspects the wife of being unfaithful to him and it is not true.

There was a nine step process:

(Step #1) - The husband was to bring his wife to the priest and bring an offering to be made
Num. 5:15-16.

This brought the wife to appear “before the Lord” (5:16, 18, 25, 30). What this means is she was taken to a very public place, which would be near the altar just outside the sacred Tabernacle. If a wife were brought to this place she would be in front of many people. According to Jewish writers, before this happened, a priest would try to get the wife to confess it privately before she was taken before the priest. If she had done it and offered apologies, she could be divorced rather than executed (George Bush, *Numbers*, p. 75). But if she didn't confess it, according to **verse 16** the priest was to bring her before the Lord. A woman would be foolish to not admit the truth before she got before the presence of the Lord.

There will be millions of people who will end up burning in hell for this very same reason. They will not admit the truth about their sin until they get before the Lord and it will be too late.

(Step #2) - The priest took water and put it in an earthen pot, then added floor dust. **5:17**

What made this water “holy” was the fact that it had been set apart for sacred use in regard to the O.T. tabernacle. The water was to be put in an earthen vessel, probably a clay pot or cup, and dust from the floor of the tabernacle was to be put into the water.

This shows that God is sovereign over the heavenly and the earthly and when one is brought before Him, sacred judgments are made on the basis of earthly things.

(Step #3) - The priest was to loosen the woman's hair and let it fall down as if in mourning. **5:18**

It is unclear as to what this actually means. Unbound hair was a sign of different things (Lev. 10:6; 13:45; 21:10).

There are three possibilities of what this means:

- 1) It is a sign of mourning over sin;
- 2) It is a sign that she is unclean as a leper;
- 3) It is a sign of shame.

He would place the grain offering in her hands and the priest would hold the cup of dust water in his hands. The dust water is given a name here in **verse 18**; it is named "the bitter waters that bring a curse."

Now the woman would be holding a sacrifice right in her hands that could be offered, or she could face the possibility of drinking the water that could kill her. The Mishnah says that at any point in this process she could put a stop to it and admit the truth. Holding that sacrifice in her hand would give her the option.

At any point one can call upon Jesus Christ to save from sin and put a stop to the wrath of God. That cross of Jesus Christ gives all people the option.

(Step #4) - The priest would have a woman swear an oath before God before she drank the water. **5:19-22**

The priest would make the woman swear this oath which contained certain elements:

- 1) If there has been no immorality and you are not unclean, drinking this water will not harm you. **5:19**
- 2) If you have been involved in unclean immorality, then this water will physically destroy you. **5:21-22a**
- 3) You are to say Amen, Amen to this twice. **5:22b**

(Step #5) - The priest shall write the curses on a scroll and wash them with the water. **5:23**

The priest is to document the words on a specific scroll and then wash it with some of the dust water. This would certainly show the seriousness of this judgment based on written records.

People are storing up wrath and God's written law will shut every mouth. People are very wise to settle their sin case before they get before God.

(Step #6) - The priest shall make the woman drink some of the water. **5:24**

The priest is to make sure the woman literally drinks the "dust bitter waters that bring a curse." She is not to spit it out. It is to go into her and it will be a curse.

(Step #7) - The priest shall take the grain offering from the woman's hands and wave it before the Lord. **5:25**

The priest is to take some of the grain offering from the woman's hands that are holding the offering and wave it before the Lord.

(Step #8) - The priest shall bring a handful of grain offering to the altar and offer it up in smoke. **5:26a**

This whole matter was to be offered up as a sacred offering before God. In other words, this process is to be carried out with a focus on the worship of God.

(Step #9) - The priest shall make the woman drink the rest of the water. **5:26b**

If the woman was guilty the results would show it. God would Himself bring about this judgment. He would cause her abdomen to swell; she would waste away and be a curse among her people.

If she conceived a baby she would miscarry or be without child the rest of her life and a curse to the people (**5:27**).

But if the woman were not guilty, she would be proved to be clean and God would bless her (**5:28**). According to **verses 29-30**, this is the law that determined immorality. It is interesting that **verse 31** says that if the woman is guilty the man will be free from guilt. But what if she wasn't?

Now some observations need to be made:

- 1) There is no place that we know of where any man ever did this with his wife.
- 2) This was a public exposure and most husbands would not want to publicly expose this.
When Mary was pregnant with Jesus, Joseph suspected immorality. But he was not going to publicly do this. His initial reaction was to privately put her away.
- 3) If the husband were wrong in his suspicions, he would owe her a great apology and would have to work to rebuild the relationship. However, the woman would shine bright with a great reputation (i.e. Joseph).
- 4) Although this law of jealousy is no longer operative, do not assume that God does not observe Sin and that He will not judge sin.
- 5) If God's people want God's blessings, they must keep themselves free from defiling sin.
I Tim. 5:22

Now the grace of God will and does forgive immorality, including every kind of adultery and immorality (I Corinthians 6; John 8:1-11). However, before God will forgive any sin and cleanse any sinner, one must face it and admit it. There is only one sacrifice that will prevent God's wrath and that is Jesus Christ. Turn to Him and you will be made clean.