

Numbers 5 • Sanctification in Right Relationships

Introduction

“Sanctification” seems like such an intimidating word, like something that is way beyond our human reach or power. Yet, Scripture continues to provide us with real-world examples of how it is practiced and achieved within the mortal grasp of our life. At the heart of the definition of sanctification is to be set apart, wholly devoted to God alone. This is not something that is to be done just when it comes to worship or the deity we choose to follow, but in our very relationships with everyone around us. The quality of our personal relationships is a visible indicator of our degree of devotion to God.

¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a dead person. ³You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst.”

⁴The sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp; just as the LORD had spoken to Moses, thus the sons of Israel did.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: From a practical point of view, why do we now know that this would have been a beneficial practice for ancient people?

A: It would prevent the spread of disease.

Q: The Old Testament Law taught extensively on how to identify and deal with things that are “unclean”. What is the spiritual application of God’s Word concerning “clean” and “unclean” things?

A: It’s not just limited to physical things, but applies to spiritual, particularly to behavior and doctrine. False doctrine and teaching is “unclean” whereas God’s doctrine and teaching is “clean”. One leads to spiritual health, the other to spiritual death.

Q: There are many different levels of “unclean” defined in Scripture. What do these 3 particular items have in common?

A: They are all unclean things that can be made clean again. They don’t necessarily make a person permanently unclean, which would demand permanent separation. If they are willing, they can undergo a process by which they can become clean and rejoin the community.

Q: How are these 3 conditions different in terms of their effect?

A: They represent varying degrees of uncleanness that require different lengths of separation and more or less vigorous methods of restoration. The process of becoming clean from skin disease is much longer and arduous than that resulting from touching a corpse, for instance.

Q: What is the spiritual application of this principle for the New Testament church?

A: The **temporary** separation that may be required of those that embrace false doctrine and/or lifestyles in order to protect the body in general and make the individual face the reality of their situation. They can rejoin the body once they are rid of false beliefs and behavior, but may require temporary removal to prevent the spread of spiritual disease.

Q: Is this treating someone as a “sinner”?

A: Sin may be a major component, but it is not the overwhelming factor. This is dealing with someone who either is no longer walking according to God’s ways and actively enticing others to stray with them, or introducing wrong and unbiblical teaching that can destroy the body. Things that “contaminate” or “pollute” need to be separated and isolated.

⁵Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁶“Speak to the sons of Israel, ‘When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, ⁷then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged. ⁸But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution which is made for the wrong must go to the Lord for the priest, besides the ram of atonement, by which atonement is made for him. ⁹Also every contribution pertaining to all the holy gifts of the sons of Israel, which they offer to the priest, shall be his. ¹⁰So every man’s holy gifts shall be his; whatever any man gives to the priest, it becomes his.’”

¹¹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹²“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘If any man’s wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, ¹³and a man has intercourse with her and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband and she is undetected, although she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act, ¹⁴if a spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife when she has defiled herself, or if a spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife when she has not defiled

[Read v.5-10]

Q: How is this different from the previous situation?

A: Whereas the previous situation deals with “unclean” people that need to be temporarily removed until they’re “clean” again, this deals with personal sin between people and the need for reconciliation.

Q: According to v.6, what kind of sin is being addressed?

A: “*The sins of mankind*”. In other words, sins that people commit against each other.

Q: Although these are sins committed between people, why is it significant that they are characterized as “acting unfaithfully against the LORD”?

A: How we treat others is the expression of our faithfulness to God. It’s not limited to the damage we’ve incurred with another but in our personal relationship with God as well.

Application: *How would we treat others differently if we truly lived in the knowledge that how we treat them is exactly how we’re treating God? Does this apply **JUST** in the case of sin, or does it include accountability and teaching as well?*

Q: Why do you suppose that it’s necessary for God to stipulate in v.6, “and that person is guilty”?

A: No one can properly deal with sin without first proceeding from absolute acknowledgment of their guilt. It’s not enough to say, “Well, because God thinks it’s wrong” or “Because my friend thinks it’s wrong I’ll take responsibility”. Without personal and sincere admission of guilt there is no biblical provision for atonement of sin.

Q: What are the 2 basic required steps and how do they address the WHOLE issue of reconciliation?

A: “...*he shall confess his sins*” and “*he shall make restitution*”. The former action is reconciliation with God, the latter with the person. It reconciles us to **BOTH** parties we’ve offended.

Q: Contrast this Law to the previous. What is different in terms of their scope of coverage? Do they cover the same type of relationships?

A: The Law for spiritual uncleanness deals with “corporate” relationships—that is, sin that is potentially harmful to the entire body. This Law deals with sin that is harmful to personal relationships between individual members of the body.

[Read v.11-15]

Q: At first glance this process seems completely weighted in favor of the husband with little or no consideration for the wife. But why is this, in reality, a kind of protection for women of these ancient times?

A: In most cultures women were treated as property. God’s Law given to Israel actually elevated the protection of women, in this case that a divorce could not be granted merely because a man became jealous and suspected something. In the context of the cultures of the day, this was extraordinary protection for women that the matter be settled before God.

Q: What is unusual about the grain offering that is required for what is termed here “a grain offering of memorial”?

A: Whereas ordinary offerings symbolized bringing forth the fruit of a sanctified life in good works by being made from fine wheaten flour, this

herself,¹⁵ the man shall then bring his wife to the priest, and shall bring as an offering for her one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall not pour oil on it nor put frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of memorial, a reminder of iniquity.

consisted of the much cheaper barley meal to represent the ambiguous, suspicious character of her conduct. Because such conduct did not proceed from the Spirit of God and was not carried out in prayer, oil and incense—the symbols of such—were not added to the offering. Altogether it was a solemn occasion to bring the thing before the judgment of God, and the absence of the elements indicate the absence of a final verdict, whether innocent or guilty.

Q: What do you suppose is the deeper spiritual condition that is being addressed here?

A: Individual faithfulness. Throughout Scripture the repeated example used by God to teach us of how He views our personal relationship with Him is that of marriage, or a wife devoted to her husband. Those that go astray after alternate gods and doctrines are characterized as adulterous.

Q: Why do you suppose that biblical jealousy is not characterized as a negative quality and might even have positive benefits?

A: First, if a husband cared not at all for his wife's feelings or affections, he'd never feel jealousy. It's an indication of desiring an exclusive relationship, just as God describes Himself as "a jealous God". Second, it's a defensive mechanism of keeping away all influences that might lead to someone going astray, to eventually becoming unfaithful. Such influences are destroyed at the earliest stages before they ever have an opportunity to take root.

Q: How do we know when jealousy is unbiblical and leading towards the wrong result?

A: When it results in or fosters envy or hatred.

Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die."

Genesis 30:1

Do not envy a man of violence And do not choose any of his ways.

Proverbs 3:31

Q: What are the results of godly jealousy?

A: It's a consuming, single-minded pursuit of a good end.

He said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

1 Kings 19:10

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Exodus 20:5

Q: How does Paul use jealousy in the proper context to explain the spiritual purposes at issue?

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure

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virgin.

2 Corinthians 11:2

Application: For what reasons have you exhibited jealousy in a relationship? Would you describe them as being biblically “acceptable” or “unacceptable”?

[Read v.16-28]

¹⁶Then the priest shall bring her near and have her stand before the LORD, ¹⁷and the priest shall take holy water in an earthenware vessel; and he shall take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water. ¹⁸The priest shall then have the woman stand before the LORD and let the hair of the woman’s head go loose, and place the grain offering of memorial in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy, and in the hand of the priest is to be the water of bitterness that brings a curse. ¹⁹The priest shall have her take an oath and shall say to the woman, “If no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray into uncleanness, being under the authority of your husband, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings a curse; ²⁰if you, however, have gone astray, being under the authority of your husband, and if you have defiled yourself and a man other than your husband has had intercourse with you” ²¹(then the priest shall have the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman), “the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people by the LORD’S making your thigh waste away and your abdomen swell; ²²and this water that brings a curse shall go into your stomach, and make your abdomen swell and your thigh waste away.” And the woman shall say, “Amen. Amen.”

²³The priest shall then write these curses on a scroll, and he shall wash them off into the water of bitterness. ²⁴Then he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings a curse, so that the water which brings a curse will go into her and cause bitterness. ²⁵The priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman’s hand, and he shall wave the grain offering before the LORD and bring it to the altar; ²⁶and the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering as its memorial offering and offer it up in smoke on the altar, and afterward he shall make the woman drink the water. ²⁷When he has made her drink the water, then it shall come about, if she has defiled herself and has been unfaithful to her husband, that the water which brings a

Q: What is the purpose of having the woman’s hair hang loose?

A: It’s a symbol that she is no longer under the protection of her husband—the accuser in this case—but at the mercy of God.

Q: What did the dust in the water symbolize?

A: It alluded to the fact that dust was eaten by the serpent (Genesis 3:14) as the curse of sin, and therefore served as a symbol of something that may deserve a curse because of personal sin.

Q: Why is the grain offering placed in the woman’s hands?

A: So that she might bring the fruit of her conduct—whether true or false according to the charge of adultery—before God for His holy judgment.

Q: How does the oath (v.19) begin? Does it assume guilt or innocence?

A: It begins by assuming innocence.

Q: Does this process allow the husband to decide the outcome or to invoke justice?

A: The results are left up to God, not man.

Point: We are to do everything possible to encourage faithful spiritual relationships, but in the absence of irrefutable evidence of unfaithfulness we are to bring and leave the matter in the hands of God.

Q: What is the symbolism of writing the curses on a scroll and then washing them off into the water?

A: The words represent God’s Truth, which will destroy the guilty and uphold the innocent. It works both ways as either a blessing or a curse, as either protection for the innocent or destruction for the guilty.

Q: So the oath occurs BEFORE the woman drinks the water. Why is this significant?

A: It’s not these “things”—the bowl, water, dust, scroll, or even the offering—that has “magic” powers to provide an outcome, but a person’s heart. The oath is one’s personal testimony to God and these other things outward symbols of what will result from such a vow. It always comes back to the issue of the condition of the heart, not whether one follows the rules of a ritual.

Q: What is the spiritual result of this process?

A: God’s judgment will eventually manifest itself in her life to either affirm the validity of the charges of being unfaithful, or refuting them. This ritual and oath of purification makes what was deemed “unclean” to again be “clean”.

curse will go into her and cause bitterness, and her abdomen will swell and her thigh will waste away, and the woman will become a curse among her people. ²⁸But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, she will then be free and conceive children.

²⁹This is the law of jealousy: when a wife, being under the authority of her husband, goes astray and defiles herself, ³⁰or when a spirit of jealousy comes over a man and he is jealous of his wife, he shall then make the woman stand before the LORD, and the priest shall apply all this law to her. ³¹Moreover, the man will be free from guilt, but that woman shall bear her guilt.”

[Read v.29-31]

Q: Are there any compelling reasons why such a law was not made equally in favor of women?

1. If such a power were granted wives, it might lessen the greater biblical authority husbands are given over them.
2. Much more damage can result in the institutions of marriage and family by the adultery of women than men.
3. Women are apt to be more suspicious than men.
4. Others?

Q: Why was the man to be free from guilt, even if the charge turned out to be false?

A: It's not so much a "male versus female" thing as it's a teaching on the nature of biblical jealousy. Since the goal of the man is aligned with the goal of **biblical** jealousy-- a consuming, single-minded pursuit of a good end—and not the result of **unbiblical** jealousy—fostering envy or hatred—there is no guilt attached.

Application: How should **WE** treat those that make us accountable for the quality of our faithfulness and walk with God? Is it possible that we don't see the true intent of God's love at work and ourselves respond inappropriately to them?

Q: How does this Law fit in with the previous Laws in Leviticus 5?

A: The first deals with corporate relationships, the second with personal relationships, and this one with intimate relationships.

Q: How are these similar to the teachings of the grain sacrifices in Leviticus 11?

A: There were 3 types of grain sacrifices: Cooked out in the open on a griddle where everything could be publicly witnessed, cooked in a pan that was partially covered and only some of what went on could be witnessed without standing directly over it, and the last cooked in an oven, completely sealed from view. So are these issues alike: Spiritual uncleanness is a matter in full view of everyone else, personal sin is a matter between individuals that can only be partially observed from the outside, and personal faithfulness can only be fully tested and affirmed by God Himself, being fully hidden from view.

Overall Application

How might the following be applied to this lesson:

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

1 Timothy 1:5

The condition of our heart, conscience, and faith is what ultimately results in biblical love. A "pure heart" is living in the absence or even shadow of sin, a "good conscience" is to not just acknowledge God's ways but to embrace them, and a "sincere faith" is to remain ever faithful in our relationship with God. They're the combination of the Laws provided in Numbers 5 applied to our spiritual walk.