

**Stinging and Shining:
The Role of the People of God in the World
Exodus 22:16-31
May 14, 2006**

The Purpose of the Bible is really simple. It can be spoken in one simple sentence: God who creates a world for His glory and will bring this world to its consummation for His glory is working in the world to raise up and redeem a people for Himself who will live for the praise of His glory until His work is finished and we rule and reign with Him through Jesus by the power of His Spirit forever. And the bulk of the Bible is about God's raising up and redeeming His people who live for the praise of His glory. The first two chapters of the Bible are about the perfectly pristine period of those first days before the Fall and the final two chapters are about that perfect period of purity when the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdoms of our God and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever. But everything in between is about our holy and righteous God reaching out to sinners to redeem from them for Him His own who live out His way in this world because we have been redeemed by His grace, revolutionized by His grace so that by His grace our lives are radically reoriented.

This section in Exodus is about what life in the community of faith and in the context of the world looks like for those who have been redeemed by the grace of God. We have already examined the issues of family responsibility, personal relationships, and property rights. And we come to this morning to the ethical and moral responsibility that we are called to exercise as the people of God in the midst of a pagan world.

What God is teaching us here in the context of the Old Covenant comes to its fulfillment in the New Covenant in the words of Jesus in the sermon on the mount, Matthew 5:13-16. Salt was used primarily as an agent of penetration so as to promote preservation so that that which was penetrated would not suffer corruption and thus not be fit for consumption. Light was for penetrating the darkness to promote protection and provision so that one could see clearly so as to accomplish completely what needed to be done. Jesus here states the obvious: salt that looks like salt and smells like salt and tastes like salt that does not function as salt is of no use. It is thrown outside to be trampled underfoot. And candles are not lit to be hidden but to illumine so as to dispel every corner of darkness. Salt stings that which it touches so as to keep it from suffering ruin and light shines in

the darkness so as to dispel it and overcome it so that people don't have to walk about in it. So Jesus says in verse 16 and then in the verses that follow He teaches us how we are to live as those who sting and shine in a world dominated by the darkness of deception.

What Jesus is doing in Matthew in the sermon on the Mount is the same thing that Moses is doing here when he came down from the mount. This is what God said and this is how you are to live it out in your daily life. Now it is very important for us to see how this text works. Three issues are set before us with each one of them culminating in a communication about the character of God. Verses 16-19 are about the issue of Sexual Purity and the culminating communication is in verse 20. The sacrifice is the symbol of worship. What God is saying is that where there is not sexual purity among the people who proclaim to be the people of God, it is as clear a revelation that we will get that we are worshipping something or someone other than God. There can be no compromise on this issue. Verses 21-27 address the issue of social responsibility teaching us that we are responsible to give care to certain members of the community of faith and then verse 28 reminds us that when we do not do as we are commanded to do, we are blaspheming God which we do not know we are doing because we are in complete control of our lives and do not submit to anybody anywhere at any time. Verses 29-30 address the issue of spiritual integrity and are concluded by verse 31 which is the pinnacle point of this passage where we are reminded that the holiness of God manifest to us is directly proportionate to the holiness of God manifest in us and through us. We do not live as His holy people because we have not tasted either of His holy presence or power no matter what we say about our relationship with this holy God.

But this teaching about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world begins with the issue of sexual purity. Two issues are made plain in these opening words: marital fidelity and male headship. These two issues cannot be separated. Marital fidelity means that God brings a man and a woman together in marriage and it is the marriage of a man to a woman that is the only acceptable context for sexual expression. Anything else is pagan perversion. And marital fidelity and sexual purity which means sex only within marriage is to be proclaimed and practiced by the people of God. Male headship means that God has placed the responsibility for the honor of His holy name upon men and gives to godly men the responsibility of leading our families and the family of God to live lives in the world that honor, magnify and glorify His Name. Look at how the two are tied

together here. Premarital sex is seen as a sin and the responsibility is on the man and he must pay, but the father as head of his house may find that this man is not God's man for his girl; so he refuses to let her marry him but the guy must still pay. This text teaches us that we are sinners. It shows us that sin is serious in the eyes of God and always carries consequences, and sexual sins carry serious consequences. Ask David and Bathsheba or any person here who has been caught in the vice grip of sexual sin. And God has called men to lead the way in our families so that we honor sexual purity both to proclaim it and practice it no matter what the world is doing. Because if we don't it opens wide the door to sexual perversions that are the result of satanic deception.

Look at the next verse. It seems to be oddly placed because of the focus of the rest of the verses but nothing in God's Word is ever oddly placed. This verse shows us that satanic seduction that leads to sexual perversion. Turn to Deuteronomy 18:9-13. The warning here is that the people of God are decidedly different from whatever world they may live in during any period of time. We don't decide to be different; the decision is the other way: to conform to the culture which brings corruption to the church. And this is clearly seen as we follow this word that is used here in Deuteronomy into the New Testament where aside from one use in Galatians 5:20, it is found only in the final book of the Bible which describes the satanic seduction of the last days. Look at Revelation 9:20-21 and see that what is absent is repentance and what is present is satanic seduction that leads to sexual immorality. Look at Revelation 18:21-24 where what is depicted is a powerful, prominent and prosperous people who were so driven by their pleasure that they would not pay attention to the proclamation of the Word of God thinking right up the day of their destruction that they were a people whose light was burning brightly in the night, because how could a people be so powerful and so prosperous and not be blessed of God? Look at Revelation 21:6-8 and 22:14-15. Who is outside and what happens to salt that does not serve its function even while it looks like, smells like and tastes like salt?

Let me be clear: the only kind of culture that can dismiss male headship or where males dismiss their responsibility as leaders in the home and the church and where we take lightly sexual perversion and treat marriage as a come and go affair is a culture where the church is not distinctive in her witness because she doesn't penetrate the pagan culture with a gospel witness but is like the pagan culture because the "god" she

worships is not “god” at all. God calls His people to practice sexual purity through the exercise of marital fidelity and the expression of male headship in the home and in the church.

We are not only called to sexual purity but also to social responsibility. Three groups are set before us here: the stranger, the struggling and the saints. The alien is someone who is not from your race or region nor from your culture or class who has come to live among you; and it is the people of God who are to reach out to them to receive them and to embrace them as we embody and announce to them the good news of the gospel. The church is to be for them a haven of refuge and a place of rest and the people of God are to be family to those who are strangers since we should understand more than anybody in the community what they feel like. The widows and orphans represent the legitimately needy; those who by circumstance and condition of life have been left bereft of support. Let me remind you again that we have to be more careful here in our culture since here we have created a community of poverty for people who are not poor. We must be able to discern the clear difference between laziness which doesn't want to work and lack of ability to work. And the third group are fellow saints; I love for my banker to read verse 25. Now let me tell you what this means: here is a man who has fallen on hard times, a brother in the body. He needs a job but needs a little help to hold him for the first day on the job. So, he calls on a brother to help him who does but keeps his outer garment as a guarantee. At the end of the day the man gets paid and pays back what he owes the man who loaned him money and gets back his cloak, this is justice and grace mingled together.

Notice the communication here about the character of God: if we do not care for those who are our responsibility the result is that we blaspheme God and the reason is that we are consumed by our own lives. Our relationship to God becomes whatever we decide it is going to be and we do not submit to anybody at all. That is why these final words are so crucial. They address the issue of spiritual integrity rooted in the expression of stewardship that emerges out of a genuine understanding of ownership. We give what God requires because we know to whom we and all that God has given us belongs. Verse 29a is the call to stewardship and 29b-30 is about ownership. Going to the place of worship on the eighth day was about declaring to God that this child or calf belongs to you and has been given to me to nurture for your glory. I will not clutch what you have given me nor will I conduct my life so that what you have given becomes the center of

attention and my reason for living. That is idolatry. The child is yours. I will teach them your Word, pray into them your will, desire that they be devoted to you and do your work and release them to you because they like me belong to you.

The last sentence seals for us all that God is seeking to say here. It seems so odd: don't eat roadkill until we hear it in its context. What is done to salt that is useless as salt? Turn to Matthew seven. Jesus gives us the model prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 and what follows is the fleshing out of that prayer in the life of everyday. Matthew 7:6 is the fleshing out of the final line of the prayer: lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. And what is the constant, consistent, continual temptation to God's people in every age: compromise your commitment so that you can accommodate to the culture, that is what God really wants, isn't it? How are you going to reach them if you do not become like them? The world entertains us and we have to do that as a church to get people to come; it's ok for us not to be different in how we dress, what we watch, what we listen to; God understands, doesn't He? Listen to how He speaks to this and to what Jesus says. He says that down to something so simple as what we eat ought to reveal that we are held by a holy God and we are His holy people; and Jesus says that there is nothing more sacred than our living as sanctified people, so don't throw that to the dogs.

But we do compromise a little here and a little there until before you know it we are as comfortable around pagans as we are the people of God and we are proud that we can hang out with them and they really do like us because we not like those other folks. Paul says, "watch out for the dogs." Do you know who he is talking about? People who were coming into the church in Philippi and teaching the people that they could have a relationship with God and live as were the people of the world; God wanted them to have whatever they wanted and they ought to not feel that Paul was right that to be saved meant being separated from the world so that one would suffer for his serving. And many chose to wander after the dogs; many still do, but what about you?