

"Pursue Holiness"

Numbers 5-6

As we come to Ch's 5-6 in Numbers, we have been learning that God was preparing His people to be ready for battle when they get into the land of Canaan (numbering the men for an army in Ch. 1), preparing the people to live with God as the center of your life (dividing the camp by tribes and how to march out with God always central, Ch. 2). How the Levites were set apart for God's service at the Tabernacle since the rest can't approach God except through them and the priests (Ch. 3). And then in Ch. 4 how the responsibilities for the Tabernacle were divided among the 3 sons of Levi and their families. There's a lot of time and information spent on the special roles of the priests and Levites, who were to be holy and set apart to the Lord.

But what if you weren't a Levite or a priest - which was like 85-90% of Israel - couldn't they be holy and set apart for God? Yes, anyone could and can be holy. When God first called Israel out of Egypt, His first official speech to them in Ex. 19 when they arrived at Mt. Sinai, God said to all of them:

This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Yes, God wanted everyone to be holy and everyone to have some kind of priestly ministry, however, that was conditional on obeying Him fully and keeping His covenant mandates. That makes sense for all of us if we want to pursue holiness. It depends then on how willing we are to obey God fully. While the people of God are positionally holy, set apart for God in a relationship with Him by faith, yet we need to have a practical and growing holiness whereby, through our willingness to obey God more fully, we grow in becoming more holy. We see in James 4:7-10,

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

To obey God more fully requires examining ourselves more closely to repent of any known sins so that the presence of God is tangible now that our desires are healthy and holy.

In Numbers 5-6 then, God adds some ways in which Israel could grow in holiness, from which we can glean principles in our own pursuit of holiness. I say "adds" because He already gave Israel many laws and stipulations in Exodus and Leviticus. These two chapters can be neatly organized by the introductions to God speaking:

5:1 The Lord said to Moses, ² "Command the Israelites to ...

5:5 The Lord said to Moses, ⁶ "Say to the Israelites: ...

5:11 Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ...

6:1 The Lord said to Moses, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ...

The first 3 God speeches in Ch. 5 all deal with ways the people of God can restore our holiness when we all find themselves out of fellowship with God. The reason we have to pursue holiness on a practical level is that we are not always walking right with God. We are reminded here that

All of Us Experience Disfellowship with God **5:1-31**

Why is that? Vv.1-4 remind us

We live in a sin-filled world (vv.1-4)

There is nothing perfect in the world. We rub shoulders with worldly people obviously but we also experience the physical affects of living in a sin-infected world. In vv.2-3 we read

Command the Israelites to send away from the camp anyone who has an infectious skin disease or a discharge of any kind, or who is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body. ³ Send away male and female alike; send them outside the camp so they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them."

Some translations unfortunately say 'leprosy' instead of skin diseases, but the word doesn't mean leprosy specifically, it refers to general skin diseases that everyone gets from time to time. And bodily discharges aren't the day-to-day natural functions of our bodies but when we have infections from cuts, bruises and sicknesses (like the woman with the bleeding issue in Mark 5. And everyone will come in contact with a deceased body in their life. What's the point here? All of these are consequences of the fall and the reason we have diseases and infections and death is because sin entered the world. So when these things happened, God asked that the people go outside the Camp, away from the physical symbolic presence of God. According to Lev. 13, they would first go to the priest because he's the mediator between God. He examines them and determines whether they are clean or unclean. Being unclean meant you are affected by sin's consequences that disfellowshipped you temporarily from being in God's presence but it didn't always mean you directly sinned against God. They usually were told to withdraw for a week, come back and be re-examined. Typically, most minor diseases and infections improve significantly in a week's time.

But we indirectly sin against God too. When we ignore Him when we shouldn't. When we rub shoulders with the world we are not as distinct as we could be. When we silently refuse to speak for God when we should have, we know we're not in the perfect oneness we should be with God. We ask His forgiveness and believe we are forgiven based on the blood of Christ and we move forward desiring to pursue more holiness in the future. So this is the point of vv.1-4.

Vv.5-10 though deal with sins of commission when God's people directly hurt another. We too find ourselves out of fellowship with God and each other because

We all commit sins against one another (vv.5-10)

'When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord, that person is guilty ⁷ and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged.

Lev. 6:1-7 details the full restitution by what sacrifices they were to bring, repay what is owed or damaged and add 20% damage fee. One of the best examples of this is when Zaccheus acknowledges his sin before Jesus and says in Luke 19:8

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

The Law only required 20% but he was willing to pay 400%! Maybe an exaggeration but clearly far more than what the Law required. Jesus acknowledged his heart change by saying 'Today salvation has come to this house because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.' He shared the same faith in God as Abraham.

The principle carries clearly over to us. When we have wronged someone or said something we shouldn't, we need to repair the damage, ask for forgiveness and perhaps look to see how you can show your sorrow by doing something beyond a simple 'I'm sorry'.

The 3rd illustration is perhaps one of the most bizarre teachings we have in the Law. It has to do when

Num. 5:13If a man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him ¹³ by sleeping with another man, and this is hidden from her husband and her impurity is undetected (since there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act), ¹⁴ and if feelings of jealousy come over her husband and he suspects his wife and she is impure—or if he is jealous and suspects her even though she is not impure—

Then there is this process where he goes to the priest with his wife and she is to drink water set apart as holy with Tabernacle dust in it, mixed with a bland grain offering and when she drinks it God will reveal whether she is pregnant or not with another man's child and causes her to lose the child. Or if she doesn't get sick, she will be free to conceive children. God summarizes in v.29

²⁹ " 'This, then, is the law of jealousy when a woman goes astray and defiles herself while married to her husband, ³⁰ or when feelings of jealousy come over a man because he suspects his wife. The priest is to have her stand before the Lord and is to apply this entire law to her. ³¹ The husband will be innocent of any wrongdoing, but the woman will bear the consequences of her sin.' "

As strange as this sounds – and there are no examples of this recorded in the Old Testament – I wonder if it's actually a brilliant idea of God's to prevent people from committing adultery. Because if a woman is tempted to commit adultery, she needs to think about the humiliating consequences of going through this ordeal. And if she's guilty, that child will no longer live.

Or if a man is thinking of divorcing his wife and claims she committed adultery (falsely), then he will be ashamed when his false accusations are revealed by her innocence. Or if he is thinking of committing adultery with another woman and they are found out or her husband senses she is unfaithful to him, then the adulterer will also be ashamed by his infidelity as well. He should think seriously about the consequences his actions will bring for both of them. And I think this is the point:

Guard your heart (vv.11-31)

If we're tempted to sin sexually [adultery, pornography, premarital sex, same sex relationships] think about the consequences of how hurt and shame will come to the yourself and your spouse and your children and the community. In a long section about avoiding adultery in Prov. 6:20-34, the section concludes with this:

Prov. 6:32 But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself.

³³ *Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away; ³⁴for jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. ³⁵ He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse the bribe, however great it is.*

Steve Green wrote a song called 'Guard your heart' and one of the lines goes, "Guard your heart, guard your heart, as a payment for pleasure it's a high price to pay."

So God gives Moses some additional instructions not found in Exodus or Leviticus about what to do when God's people are out of fellowship with God or how best to avoid that; which is the direction He goes in 6:1-21 with the Nazarite vow. God doesn't only tell us what not to do, He tells us ways we can show we want to be closer to Him. So the Nazarite vow illustrates for us that

All of Us Can Experience Closer Fellowship with God **(6:1-21)**

A lot of space in the Law is given for instructions to the priests and Levites. They are 'set apart' for the Lord. They have extra responsibilities to perform and need to be more careful about maintaining their holiness. But what about everybody else? Can any non-Levites experience closer fellowship with God too? Absolutely, God says. 'Here's a way I want to bless if you desire to draw closer to Me.'

If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the Lord as a Nazirite, ³ he must ...

This was open to men or women and it all has to do with making vows to withdraw from some good things (any fermented drink and especially nothing from grapes including seeds or skin) in order to focus more on God. People would know visibly you had taken a vow because you would also not cut your hair (v.5) and keep away from a dead body even if it was a close family member (vv.6-7) and they are to do this for a pre-determined length of time and when completed, offer to God certain offerings.

The word 'Nazar' means separation, here a separating oneself from certain things in order to separate oneself more to the Lord. God was inviting His people to experience His presence more fully by refraining from some things that were enjoyable while on the other hand showing your devotion to God by doing something extraordinary, growing your hair long and avoiding contact with deceased. God was saying, I appreciate and will bless you with My presence when you intentionally draw closer to Me. So this was extra and voluntary. But what God is telling all of us is,

Don't settle for a minimalistic faith (vv.1-12)

Too often we do, however. We're content with a simple, quick devotional time with God. Maybe we read the Daily Bread – which is fine – and pray over our usual list – which too is good - but is that all we have been doing for years? Or maybe we always pray as we go to work – nothing wrong with that – but has that become the only way we pray?

Perhaps you have a Bible reading program that you follow consistently but have you ever changed that up? Have you ever read through the whole Bible? Have you even read it in a different translation?

We're pretty good at showing up for church most of the time but I'm guessing some of you have never attended Sunday School or a Bible study. Or you rarely or never attend any church social gathering outside of a Sunday morning. And you've never gotten involved on a committee or become a member or you've been saved for years and you still haven't been biblically baptized? Are you living a minimalist faith? Just living the same way you always have without stretching yourself spiritually? Without growing spiritually closer to God? Why not? Because we're not willing to make sacrifices in our life for God who sent His Son to sacrifice Himself for us and lives completely for our good.

Do we ever think that God lives 100% sacrificially for us all the time? Everything He does is for our ultimate good to bring us into His presence forever. God, Jesus and the Spirit were existing quite fine without us forever before they made a world and life. God could snap His fingers and shut it all down if He wanted to do but He won't, why? Because He had made promises to us that He won't fail on because He is true to His Word. The Nazarite vow was a way the average Israelite could draw closer to God by

Faith in God [which] requires sacrificial living (6:13-21)

In vv. 13-21, we read about all the extra sacrifices they have to make to God when they fulfill their vow. Wait a minute, I'm sacrificing my time and energy to be with God for a period of time just so I can give Him more? Why would I want to do that? We do it by faith believing that the God who says 'Do this for me' will result in our experiencing His presence more fully in our life. And that's the best thing for us. What's eternity? Spending forever with God in sinless holiness. If that's going to be perfection and result in eternal joy, why are we so unwilling to make small sacrifices for Him now so we can experience His presence more. But to come closer to His presence means a closer examination of our sinfulness.

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

We want God to come near to us and lift us up without all the humbling and washing and purifying and submission. We selfishly settle for a minimalistic faith in God when God wants so much more for us/ What does He want for us?

²² The Lord said to Moses, ²³ "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

²⁴ " ' "The Lord bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." ' "

²⁷ "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

See all the ways God wants to bless us!

God Wants His Presence Reflected in All of Us **(6:22-27)**

What did it mean for God's face to shine on them? What happened when Moses went into God's presence and came out after spending time talking with God? He came out reflecting the presence of God. And God says here, I want this for all of you. Not just Moses and Aaron and the

Levites. I want all my people to experience my blessing by spending time in my presence so that when the world sees you, it sees Me. Not convinced?

2 Cor. 3:12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

God wants to bless us, but He wants us to separate ourselves to Him. That's the only way it will happen. And when we do that, those around us will see God through us.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please email
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