

Purity in the Congregation and the Camp – *Deuteronomy 23:1-14*

Introduction – These verses contain restrictions on admission in places where the LORD is specially present: in the assembly of the LORD and in the military camps as Israel enters into holy war. There are many more restrictions in the Pentateuch for these assemblies, but these verses center around issues of sexual purity, hence our continuing commentary on the Seventh Commandment.

Worship in the Assembly (vv1-8) – The worship of Yahweh was always for the whole world, and even at the time of Moses, Israel had many God-fearers in their midst. While they were a part of the community, they remained ceremonially removed and not full members during this time Israel was a child being tutored (Gal 4:1ff). Emasculated men (most likely due to pagan rituals) were prohibited, as were “mamzer” (bastards, illegitimately born, possibly through cult prostitution or incest).

Ammonites and Moabites (two nations descended from incestuous relations between Lot and his daughters) were not to be allowed into the assembly for ten generations. The Ammonites are criticized for not having freely offered hospitality to the Israelites; the Moabites are criticized for their attempt to use Balaam to bring down the curse of God on the Israelites. Conversely, they were not to abhor the Edomite (descendants of Esau, a legitimate brother), nor the Egyptian (who had provided hospitality in the days of Jacob and Joseph).

Biblical Masculinity in the Conquest (vv9-14) – When the men gathered as an army to go out against the enemies, it wasn’t supposed to turn into nights of lewdness, carousing and the like. Instead, they were to keep themselves “*from every wicked thing*,” a general term referring to any immoral or evil activity. This might cover everything from sexual immorality (i.e. camp followers) to simple crudeness, and so two ritual examples are given. A man had to be quarantined and made ritually clean if he had an emission during the night (also Lev 15:16). God also required the establishment of a latrine system to keep the camp clean (vv12-13). The reason for this was “*for Yahweh your God walks in the midst of your camp...*” (v14).

Considering These Things – Ceremonial rituals in the Old Covenant have passed away, being fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Eph 2:14-18). However, many principles remain and must be applied with wisdom (1 Cor 5:13).

Mutilations, Eunuchs, and the Gospel – The male organ takes a prominent place in the story of the Gospel even though this offends “traditional” sensibilities. The sign of man’s inability to bring forth clean “seed” in his old nature and the promise that God would bring forth a new humanity through Abraham is declared in circumcision. Perverting this sign, pagans have phallic idols and rituals, and throughout history, sexual immorality has been tied up in religious cult worship along with horrible exploitation of women and children. In addition, Paul takes aim at the Judaizers for idolizing the sign of circumcision and tells them they should go ahead and cut off the whole thing (Gal 5:12). Such mutilation was forbidden among Old Covenant Israel and so Paul is making his point to them. In the Gospel, all bloody sacrifices have been fulfilled in Christ. In the Gospel, eunuchs (and by analogy any disabled or mutilated person) can be saved. This was made clear in Isaiah’s promises (Isaiah 56:3-6) and God saves the Ethiopian eunuch under Philip’s ministry (Acts 8:26ff). Therefore, we learn that these ceremonial exclusions provided symbolic teaching about holiness and the Lord; they did not declare anyone “unsavable.”

Sexual Uncleaness and the Gospel – God excluded the Moabites, turned their attempted cursings into blessings (v5), and in His beautiful ironic twists, chose Ruth, a Moabite, to be the great-grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Fornication is a grievous sin and it still runs rampant, but there is good news for anyone who has sown sexual sins (1 Cor 6:9-11). God’s Word convicts us where we are, and God’s forgiveness through Christ meets us where we are as well – but we must allow God to deal with us where He wills. Jesus is not ashamed to be touched by the unclean (Luke 8:41ff) and when He touches, He makes that which is unclean clean, reversing the curse. In this New Covenant blessing, the child of a couple, even if only one is a believer, is declared holy (1 Cor 7:14). The Gospel declares that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them (2 Cor 5:19).

No Place for Rude and Crude in Biblical Masculinity – God is not ashamed of any topic and so neither should we. The example from the Scriptures makes clear that we are responsible to answer all questions on these sensitive matters, especially with our children. At the same time, we must all learn, boys and young men particularly, that being gross is not to be equated with being masculine. Rude and crude language and behavior, carousing and filthiness, are all to be put away (Col 3:8, Eph 4:29, Gal 5:19-21). And while ceremonial cleanness is not necessary anymore, it can be argued that general hygiene is simply loving your neighbor in the little things.