

Text: Exod. 22:16-20

Title: Israel's civil law: keep unspotted from the world.

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Introduction: The world has a false idea about what a "holy man" is. For one thing, it never uses the term "holy woman" or "child." All the world's "holy men" are aging men. For another, the world's "holy men" are exceptions put on pedestals, or at least in a temple on top of a holy mountain.

To illustrate, I found this parable at a website called spiritual-short-stories.com, titled, "Four Holy Men from Four Different Religions": "In four caves in the district of Gaya, four holy men lived. They belonged to four different religions. One was a Hindu, the second was a Muslim, the third was a Christian and the fourth was a Buddhist.

"They never saw each other, neither did they ever speak to each other. Years later when they all reached salvation, the end of their religious paths, they found that they had all arrived at the same place. Then they became friends and started living in the same cave."

The moral of the story purports that the closer you get to heaven, the less you will argue about which religion is right. That is an immoral moral, of course, but I mention the story this morning to illustrate what the world thinks a "holy man" is. Holy men are the four men in the cave.

The Bible is clear that our holy God desires that all of his people, men, women, and children, be holy. His command to His people in both the Old and New Testaments is "be ye holy, for I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 20:7) and "be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

That desire for a holy people underlies the civil law God is giving the nation of Israel in the remainder of Exodus 22. The last verse of the chapter declares, "And ye shall be holy men unto Me" (v. 31). When the Lord says this, He is not merely speaking to four special Israelites in a cave somewhere. He is saying that this is His will for every man, woman, and child in the nation of Israel.

This part of the chapter reminds me a lot of James 1:27, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The concern of the first four verses seems especially focused on that aspect of holiness that is keeping ourselves unspotted from the world (vv. 16-20). Next, the care of those in affliction is addressed in the chapter (vv. 21-27), and finally, recognizing that before God the Father we are under earthly authority that we must also respect is the theme of the final verses of the chapter (vv. 28-31).

Perhaps James had this chapter in mind when he wrote about pure and undefiled religion. That same holiness and purity God desired for Israel as a nation governed by civil law, He also desires for us today under the authority of our local church family according to New Testament truth.

This morning we will focus on the first part of this passage under the title, "Israel's civil law: keep unspotted from the world." There are three things, with which the world is spotted or stained, that we must guard ourselves against to be the holy people our holy God deserves – the spot of sexual sin; the spot of sorcery; and the spot of idol worship.

I. The worldly spot of sexual sin (vv. 16-17, 19).

Illustration: In 2005 the London Zoo included in their primate exhibit a section for eight humans, three males and five females. CBS News reported that a child was heard asking, "Why are people in there?" The Zoo's spokeswoman, Polly Willis, explained that this is exactly the question they were trying to answer: "Seeing people in a different environment, among other animals ... teaches members of the public that the human is just another primate"
[<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/humans-on-display-at-londons-zoo/>].

Application: Our passage mentions two kinds of the stain of sexual sin, premarital sex and bestiality. Both were common practices in the land of Canaan, the Promised Land God planned for His people to possess. Today, we are far more familiar with the first than the second, but what these have in common is that in both cases sexual behavior is treated as though it is the same in humans and animals.

The Bible is clear that humans are not animals. We are made in the image of God, and from the beginning our Creator's plan for human sexuality was that it be part of the wonderful bond of the marital love-covenant between a man and a woman, a husband and his wife, for life. Our holy God desires holiness in this area of our lives.

Before I leave this point, I note a detail about the amazing accuracy and trustworthiness of Bible prophecy from the word translated *maid* in verse 16. It is a word that refers to an unmarried woman, a lady who normally would be a virgin, but not necessarily so. In Joel 1:8 the word refers to a widow who laments the loss of the husband of her youth.

Now you will remember that Isa. 7:14 is the great prophecy about the mother of Immanuel, God with Us, the Lord

Jesus Christ. That prophecy says that a virgin would conceive and bare a son. The word used for Mary in this prophecy, however, is not this word for an unmarried woman. It is rather a word that means exclusively a virgin.

Remember that Mary conceived Jesus while a virgin, but she was a virgin who was already betrothed or married to Joseph (Matt. 1:18-19). Today, couples live together for a time in fornication before marriage. In Bible times, couples got married or betrothed under covenant and lived apart for a time before coming together.

If Isaiah's prophecy had used this word *maid*, meaning *unmarried woman*, it would have gotten Mary's marital status wrong. So Isaiah predicted not only that a virgin would conceive, but also one that could be married already, betrothed to a husband before they had come together. Such is the level of detailed accuracy and trustworthiness of Bible prophecy, just like the rest of this infallible book.

II. The worldly spot of sorcery (v. 18).

Illustration: We have met this problem already in the Book of Exodus. The male form of this practitioner confronted Moses in Pharaoh's court (7:11). You will remember that using some form of catalepsy, the sorcerers of Egypt were able to counterfeit the supernatural creation of a serpent executed by Moses through his rod. We have many conceptions of witchcraft today, which come to us from extra-biblical sources, but biblically a sorcerer or sorceress is someone who counterfeits the supernatural works of God, either through some trickery as in the case of Pharaoh's courtiers, or through some form of demonic power.

Application: Our passage simply told Israel that this kind of worldly stain was not allowed to live in their nation. The

penalty phrase of this verse is different from the one in the following verse. It lacks the normal grammatical emphasis, and the vocabulary is softer – *allow not to live* vs. *kill/execute*. The commentators Keil and Delitzsch pick up on this difference and postulate that what is called for is an elimination of the divination, not the diviner necessarily.

As a local church, we too must avoid the worldly stain of counterfeits of and substitutes for God's supernatural works. For us too, these counterfeits and substitutes can be either human tricks or demonic power. The magicians of Pharaoh's court were known as Jannes and Jambres in the days of Paul and Timothy, and Paul wrote to Timothy about the way that local churches must keep themselves unspotted from similar influence (2 Tim. 3:1-9).

The counterfeits of God's power have a form of godliness but no real power of godliness (v. 5). The real power of God creates more than a form of godliness. It turns the lives of verses 1-4 into real godliness. The form of godliness happens for a few hours on Sunday for some. Real godliness lasts 24/7 throughout the week. That is the true power of God, and today the way we resist the influence of the counterfeits of our day with their seducing spirits and doctrines of demons is the end of verse 5 – from such turn away.

Before we leave this verse, I must say something about the coming holiday, Halloween. Our town is big into Halloween. Lots of scary decorations are beginning to appear on the town common and homes and lawns in preparation for the big day. I grew up having a lot of fun with Halloween, and some believers still try to do that. Our family no longer celebrates Halloween, and as I reflect on what changed for me in that regard, I think it was the growing realization that the holiday is not really just make-believe in our culture.

Believers of the first century faced a similar issue when it came to purchasing and consuming meat sacrificed to idols. Paul deals with this in 1 Corinthians 10 primarily. I see three things especially wrong with celebrating Halloween:

(1) Halloween is a religious festival celebrated by the occult, increasingly so in our culture today (1 Cor. 10:20, “No, but I say that things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become partners with demons”).

(2) Halloween uses the spirit of fear for entertainment purposes (2 Tim. 1:7, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and discipline”).

(3) Halloween uses death for entertainment purposes (Heb. 9:27-28, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”).

If you are lacking something to celebrate on October 31, I will give you three great options – the anniversary of Mark’s baptism; Bill’s birthday; or better yet, Reformation Day – Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the Wittenberg Chapel door on October 31st.

III. The worldly spot of idol worship (v. 20).

Illustration: As local-church members we live in a world that demands the opposite of what the Lord demands of his people in this verse. Ignatius was the pastor of the local church in biblical Antioch around 100 A.D. He had been discipled by the Apostle John, but unlike his mentor he did not die of old age. There is a document that dates from the 15th century that describes a conversation between this martyr and the Emperor Trajan that went like this:

Trajan: "Do I, your emperor, not seem to you to have the gods in my mind, too? The very gods whose assistance we enjoy in fighting against our enemies like the Dacians?"

Ignatius: "You are in error, emperor, when you call the demons of your nation gods. For there is but one God who made heaven, earth, the sea and all that are in them. And one Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God."

Trajan watched, along with 87,000 other cheering Romans, as lions tore into Ignatius ending his life.

Application: The question that confronted the nation of Israel under this civil statute was "Who must die for violating the truth of monotheism?" The question that confronts us today in this regard is more like the one Ignatius had to answer: "Am I willing to die for not believing in polytheism?" On that occasion, Ignatius is said to have identified himself to the emperor as *Theophorus*, meaning *the one who carries God*. He told the emperor, "I am the one who carries Christ in my breast." He loved the Lord supremely. He loved God as God exclusively (1 Pet. 3:15).

The Bible mentions three other loves that often compete in our hearts with the exclusive and supreme love that Christ alone is due from us. We can be lovers of self, lovers of pleasure, and lovers of money more than lovers of God. When we do that, we have become polytheistic idolators like the pagan people of Rome. Sacrificing to the gods of this world is a worldly stain that God wanted removed from the nation of His people and his local churches (1 Cor. 10:14, "Wherefore, my beloved, flee idolatry).

Conclusion: So holy men, women, and children are people who keep themselves unspotted from the world. These

spots include sexual sin, sorcery, and idolatry. So that is what God wants His people to be, but that still leaves the difficult question of “How can this be?”.

The Lord Himself poses this question in Jer. 13:23, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”

Clearly, we cannot remove the spots of the world from our lives any more than a leopard can remove spots from his fur.

But there is a way it can be done, only one way. Isa. 1:18, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Jesus’s shed blood washes the stain of sin away. Only through the power of that blood, can we be God’s holy people.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching