

God Demands a Pure Church for his Dwelling Place

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn to the book of Numbers now, chapter 5, and you'll find this on page 112 in our hardback Bibles, page 112. And we're reading the whole of chapter 5 tonight as Moses continues to tell the people of Israel of his own day the words of the Lord, and then we shall consider later how these are to be understood by us and how applied to our lives.

So the book of Numbers, chapter 5, beginning at verse 1. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Command the people of Israel that they put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge, and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead.

You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp in the midst of which I dwell.

And the people of Israel did so and put them outside the camp. As the Lord said to Moses, so the people of Israel did. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel.

When a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the Lord, and that person realizes his guilt, he shall confess his sin that he has committed.

[1 : 2 6] And he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it, and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong. But if the man has no next of kin to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for wrong shall go to the Lord for the priest, in addition to the ram of atonement with which atonement is made for him.

And every contribution, all the holy donations of the people of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his. Each one shall keep his holy donations. Whatever anyone gives to the priest shall be his.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel. If any man's wife goes astray and breaks faith with him, if a man lies with her sexually, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and she is undetected, though she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her, since she was not taken in the act.

And if the spirit of jealousy comes over him, and he is jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself, or if the spirit of jealousy comes over him, and he is jealous of his wife, though she has not defiled herself, then the man shall bring his wife to the priest, and bring the offering required of her, a tenth of an ephah of barley flour.

He shall pour no oil on it, and put no frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance.

[3 : 0 0] And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord. And the priest shall take holy water in an earthenware vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle, and put it into the water.

And the priest shall set the woman before the Lord, and unbind the hair of the woman's head, and place in her hands the grain offering of remembrance, which is the grain offering of jealousy.

And in his hand the priest shall have the water of bitterness that brings the curse. Then the priest shall make her take an oath, saying, If no man has lain with you, and if you have not turned aside to uncleanness, while you are under your husband's authority, be free from this water of bitterness that brings the curse.

But if you have gone astray, though you are under your husband's authority, and if you have defiled yourself, and some man other than your husband has lain with you, then let the priest make the woman take the oath of the curse, and say to the woman, The Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your thigh fall away, and your body swell.

May this water that brings the curse pass into your bowels, and make your womb swell, and your thigh fall away. And the woman shall say, Amen, Amen.

[4 : 20] Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and wash them off into the water of bitterness. And he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings the curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter into her and cause bitter pain.

And the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy out of the woman's hand, and shall wave the grain offering before the Lord and bring it to the altar. And the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering as its memorial portion, and burn it on the altar, and afterward shall make the woman drink the water.

And when he has made her drink the water, then if she has defiled herself and has broken faith with her husband, the water that brings the curse shall enter into her and cause bitter pain, and her womb shall swell, and her thigh shall fall away, and the woman shall become a curse among her people.

But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, then she shall be free and shall conceive children. This is the law in cases of jealousy, when a wife, though under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when the spirit of jealousy comes over a man, and he is jealous of his wife.

Then he shall set the woman before the Lord, and the priest shall carry out for her all this law. Therefore, the man shall be free from iniquity, but the woman shall bear her iniquity.

[5 : 50] Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this evening. Well, friends, let's turn to Numbers chapter 5 again, page 112 in our church Bibles.

And my title for this evening is, God demands a pure church for his dwelling place. A pure church. Now, just imagine that you're sitting in the dentist's waiting room. Is that a happy thought? Anyway, you're sitting in the waiting room, and there are glossy magazines, and you happen to have two glossy magazines open in front of you, one in your left hand and the other in your right.

And you look at the photographs. One of these magazines is filled with photographs of horrible scenes. Maybe some brave photojournalist has managed to get into a Middle Eastern city, which has been held by ISIS troops and badly battered.

And you see gruesome pictures of bombed and shattered streets, or perhaps groups of living people whose faces are distorted with grief and terror because of everything they've been suffering.

[7 : 02] Then you pick up the other magazine, which has a title like Homes and Gardens, or The Beauty of Perthshire. And you see images of beautiful houses and lovely walled gardens, deliciously appointed kitchens, interiors, living rooms, lovely sofas and wall hangings, and views out through the windows of woods and hills.

Now compare your reaction to the two magazines. From the first magazine, you recoil with a sense of pity and horror, perhaps of anger as well.

But the second produces in you feelings of intense pleasure. There's something very satisfying at looking at things of beauty. Now that second reaction, the reaction of joy and pleasure, what does that suggest?

What is there in the human heart that makes us think like that? Surely it's because beautiful gardens and homes and landscapes are a foretaste of eternal beauty.

We long somehow deep in our hearts for the beauty of our eternal home. The Bible speaks of it as rest. We long for the eternal city, which will knock the beauty of our earthly cities into a cocked hat.

[8 : 23] And above all, deep in our hearts, we long to be with God and to be with Jesus in an environment from which all sadness and wickedness and corruption have been completely removed.

Now this is no pipe dream, because the Bible promises this and much more to those who belong to Jesus Christ. If we are Christians, our longings will be fulfilled.

Now as the Bible describes all this, it uses a certain refrain, an unmistakable form of words, a phrase that keeps on recurring through the Bible.

Let me give it to you in its last form in the book of Revelation, where a loud voice from heaven says this, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

That's the last occurrence in the Bible. The first occurrence of that phrase, or something rather like it, comes in the book of Exodus, chapter 6, where God says to the people of Israel, I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.

[9 : 33] And phrases like that, with slight variations on the words, come again and again in the pages of the Old Testament prophets. These are the words at the heart of the covenant. And these words have two fundamental constituent elements, mutual possession and dwelling together.

Mutual possession, I am your God, and you are my people. And then dwelling together, I will dwell with you, and you with me.

Jesus expresses the same delightful prospect in John chapter 14, when he says to his disciples, I'm going on ahead to prepare a place for you. And when I've gone ahead and prepared a place, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also.

Together. Now that's the great goal of the Bible. It's the great goal of the gospel, that God's people should be with him. We are his, and he is ours, and he and we will dwell together.

Together. Now this dwelling place, this dwelling of God in the midst of his people, is something which happens now, in the New Testament era, as God dwells in the church, in the person of his Holy Spirit.

[10 : 50] But of course it happened also, in the Old Testament period, in a rather different way. Now the fullness of it all, the full glory of it, awaits us in the future. It's beyond this world.

But it started, in principle, way back. Just look at verse 3, in our chapter, Numbers 5 verse 3. Look at the last part of the verse. Their camp, in the midst of which, I dwell.

Now this is the key idea, that we need to grasp, if we're to understand, what is going on here, in Numbers chapter 5. The Lord God dwells, in the midst of his people, in their camp, as they journey through the wilderness, towards the promised land.

This is what the previous chapters, have been all about. We were looking last week, at the role of the priests, and the Levites. And their role, we saw in chapters 3 and 4, was to guard the tabernacle.

They even have to sleep, right around the tabernacle, the tent there, between the tabernacle, and the other tribes, of the Israelites. And their duty there, is to stop the other Israelites, from blundering into the tabernacle, and being killed.

[11 : 57] The Lord dwells there, in the midst of his people, in the tabernacle. Now of course, he's not confined, to the tabernacle. As King Solomon, was to say to him, centuries later, just having built the temple, Solomon says to God, the highest heavens, cannot contain you, how much less, this temple that I've built.

So the Lord, is not confined, to the tabernacle. He is the creator, of everything. But the Israelites, are to understand, that his presence, is there, in their very midst. And for that reason, their camp, and everything that goes on in it, must be holy, and pure.

And it's this insistence, on the purity, and holiness of the camp, which underlies, and explains everything, which is taught, in Numbers chapter 5. God's people, are called to live a life, that is utterly distinctive.

A life that is sharply, contrasted with the life, of the nations around it. So let's see, how this works out, in the three sections, of the chapter, before us. I'll take them, in the three paragraphs, in which they come.

So first of all, in verses 1 to 4, the Lord is teaching, the church, to love the purity, of obeying God's law. When you first read, verse 2, you might think, this is so harsh.

[13 : 15] Isn't it over fierce, to exclude from the camp, a person with leprosy, or a person, with a bodily discharge, or somebody, who's been in contact, with a dead body?

That's what we're told there, in the first couple of verses. After all, you might say, contracting leprosy, that's not something, you do willingly. It's not your fault, is it? And suffering, from some bodily discharge, that's somebody, that nobody wants.

It just happens, to some people. And as for touching, a dead body, well, if a close relative dies, you have to do that, don't you? A corpse, is not going to bury itself. Now, some people, might look at these verses, and say, well, this proves, of course, that the God of the Old Testament, is harsh, and severe.

Quite different, from the God of the New Testament, who is loving, and compassionate. Not so fast. What happened to Ananias, and Sapphira, in Acts chapter 5, when they told a lie, to the apostles? They were struck dead, on the spot. What happened, to that member, of the church at Corinth, who'd been sleeping, with his father's wife? He was sharply disciplined, and excommunicated.

[14 : 23] And who said, who said, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites? For you shut the kingdom of heaven, in people's faces. You neither enter it yourselves, nor do you allow those, who would enter, to go in.

And he describes, the hypocritical Pharisees, in the next verse, as children of hell. We know who said that. It's Jesus, isn't it? The Bible's portrayal of God, and of the character of God, is exactly the same, in both testaments.

Yes, he does exercise, a harsh and severe discipline, when the situation requires it. But equally, he shows profound compassion, to all, who seek him, and express to him, their need.

Just think, Old Testament, think of the Syrian general, Naaman, whose story is told, in 2 Kings chapter 5. He was not an Israelite, he was a Gentile, he was an alien, he was a leper, a leper, he was a general, but he was a leper.

And yet, he turned in his need, to the God of Israel, who had compassion on him, and healed him. And the healing of Naaman, is an early expression, in the Old Testament, of God's promise to Abraham, that all the world's nations, would find salvation, blessing, extended to them.

[15 : 37] Through the Jews, through Abraham's family. So we need to understand, these first four verses, of chapter 5, in their big Bible context. These were laws, that had to be obeyed, by the Old Testament Jews, in order to emphasize, the distinctiveness, of God's people, at that time.

Now when Jesus came, what happened to lepers? Well they came to him, they asked for help, and he healed them. What about bodily discharges? You remember that, poor woman, who'd had a hemorrhage, for 12 years, and she'd spent all her savings, on doctors, and she was no better.

But when she touched Jesus, remember she crept up, behind him in the crowd, just touched his cloak, and she was instantly, and completely healed. And as for the corrupting, influence of dead bodies, we know what Jesus did, to dead bodies, he raised them up.

It was Jairus' daughter, who was 12 years old. There was the young man, from Nain, who was being carried, out of the city for burial. And Lazarus, they were all restored, to life by Jesus. Jesus reveals, the character of God, as he says in John's gospel, he who has seen me, has seen the father.

He reveals, both the severity of God, against his opponents, as in his words, to the hard-hearted Pharisees, and he reveals, the compassion of God, to lepers, to those with bodily discharges, to those who are mourning, the death of their loved ones.

[17 : 07] And the God, and father of Jesus, is the same God, as the God of Numbers, chapter 5. So why did these, apparently tough rules, have to be obeyed back then?

Well it was to protect, the purity of the Israel, Israelites, so that they could, fulfill their great purpose, of being a light, to the Gentiles. The great pattern, of the Bible, is that God is dealing, think Genesis, to Revelation now, God is dealing, with the whole of humanity.

He doesn't start, with Abraham and Sarah, he starts with Adam and Eve, the parents of every race, of mankind. And when mankind, rebels against him, God's purpose, is to raise up a race, within the human race, that is the nation of Israel.

And the purpose of Israel, is finally, to open up salvation, and membership of God's people, to folk of every nation, who will repent, and turn to him. So that at the very end, of everything, people of every race, and tribe, and language, will be gathered, around the throne, worshipping God, and the Lord Jesus.

God never forgot, the Gentiles. It was always his purpose, to open the door, to people like us. I'm a Gentile, I imagine most of you, are as well.

[18 : 23] There's no need, to turn this up, but in Genesis chapter 10, we have a detailed listing, of all the peoples, who are descended, from Noah, from Noah's three sons, Japheth, Ham, and Shem.

And there are dozens, of tribes and nations, listed there. And the chapter, ends like this, Genesis 10. These are the clans, of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these, the nations spread abroad, on the earth, after the flood.

Now, why should God, list all those nations, Gentile nations, if he had no further purpose, for them? Genesis then moves quickly, to the story of Abraham.

And God says to Abraham, in the very moment, of calling him, and commissioning him, through you, through the nation, that you will father, all the families, of the earth, will be blessed.

But if the Jewish nation, is to be fit for purpose, if it's to be fit, for the purpose, of channeling, God's salvation, to the Gentiles, Israel has to live, a distinctive life.

[19 : 27] And when it comes, to numbers five, verses one to four, that distinctive life, is to be seen, in keeping the camp, cleansed, from everything, that might defile it. It's not that the leper, could never return.

If the leper was healed, then following, the cleansing ceremonies, which are detailed, in the book of Leviticus, they were then able, to come back, into the camp. Even Jesus told lepers, that he had healed, that they had to submit, to the rituals, and rules of Leviticus.

And likewise, people suffering, from discharges, and those who had touched, dead bodies. They were allowed, to return, to the camp, when Moses was there, after submitting, to the cleansing rituals.

But the point was, that obedience, to these things, was not optional. The highest standards, of purity, had to be observed, if Israel was to be fit, to be a light, to the Gentiles.

Now friends, isn't there a great lesson, here for the Lord's church? The relationship, of Israel, to the Gentiles, back then, is paralleled now, by the relationship, of the church, to the non-Christian world.

[20 : 37] Israel to the Gentiles, the church now, to the non-Christian world. Israel was there, to demonstrate, the character, of the one true God, to the Gentiles. Because their views of God, were utterly corrupted, by idolatry, and fertility religion.

Israel's role, was to show them, by Israel's pure, and shining behavior, what God is really like. If the Israelites, were able to do that, then the Gentiles, would begin to turn, to the God of Israel.

This turning of the Gentiles, to the true God, is just what the prophets, foresaw. Again and again, in the prophets. For example, Isaiah says this, in his second chapter. It shall come to pass, in the latter days, that the mountain, of the house of the Lord, that's Jerusalem, shall be established, as the highest, of the mountains.

It will be like Everest, all over the earth. And all the nations, shall flow to it. And many people, shall come, and say, come, let us go up, to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk, in his paths.

For out of Zion, shall go the law, and the word of the Lord, from Jerusalem. Do you see the pattern there? The word of the Lord, the truth about God, goes out from Jerusalem, and the Gentiles, hearing it, comes streaming, to the Lord's city, so that they too, can belong to it.

[22 : 04] Now that beautifully, describes our role, as the church of God today. God's word, God's gospel, God's truth, goes out from the church, into the non-Christian world.

And the non-Christian world, seeing the beauty, and the purity, of the life of God's people, comes to the Lord, saying, we want to be part of you. We want to be part of this.

But, if our shared life, is not committed, to keeping the church, pure, and uncorrupt. If we're not concerned, to expel from our camp, everything that defiles, we will have no voice, in the world. The world will look at us, and say, those church people, they're no different from us. Their life, has all the corruptions, of modern society. Now isn't this, what happens to a church, which is not concerned, to keep its camp pure.

It just becomes, a branch of the world. It loses its message, it loses its power, its vitality, its saltiness. There's nothing there. It becomes an empty shell.

[23 : 07] Our job is to be different. Our job is to be pure. To love the Lord's, distinctive and wholesome, standards and ethics. As James Philip, puts it in his commentary, on numbers.

The church has never had, a greater influence, in the world, than when she has been, most separate, from it. The church is to love, the purity, of obeying God's law.

Well now the second, and third sections, of chapter five, give us two very, concrete examples, of how to live out, the distinctive ethics, of the law of God. How to live, in the camp, in which the Lord dwells.

And both of these examples, in the second and third paragraphs, concern what you might call, our in-house relationships. And the first of these, in verses five to ten, is about confession, and restitution.

Where one person, has robbed another. And when you first read, verse six, it's not obvious, what kind of wrongdoing, is being talked about there. Just look at verse six. When a man or woman, commits any of the sins, that people commit, by breaking faith, with the Lord.

[24 : 18] And that seems very general, and non-specific. But there's a parallel passage, in Leviticus, which tells us clearly, what breaking faith, with the Lord, means here. And I'll read that passage, from Leviticus.

If anyone sins, and commits a breach of faith, against the Lord, same phrase, by deceiving his neighbor, in a matter of deposit, or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed, his neighbor, or has found something lost, lost, and lied about it.

In short, it's about stealing property, or money, and concealing the theft, and then telling lies about it. So in this paragraph, the Lord is developing, some of the implications, of the eighth commandment, thou shalt not steal.

So much of, these five books of the Bible, are developing the implications, of the commandments. Now we all know, that stealing is bad, and we all know, that it breaks down relationships, and destroys trust, and destroys trust, between people.

My wife and I, used to run, a Bible study group, in our house, at Burton-on-Trent, and there was a young man, from our church, called Tim, who used to come, to the group regularly. He was 30 or 35, I guess, and he was severely, mentally disabled, and he could only speak, a very few words, but he was also naughty, and he had a penchant, for music CDs, and we had quite a few of them. [25 : 42] And on one occasion, on the day after, Bible study group, we discovered, that three or four, of our CDs, were missing. Well we gently, confronted him, shortly afterwards, about this, and he owned up.

He hung his head, he said, Tim being a naughty boy, ha ha ha, like that. We allowed him, to keep coming to the group, but we realized, that we couldn't have him, just in the sitting room, by himself, unsupervised.

He used to come early, so he could get, into the sitting room, so we had to sit with him. Well that was petty, and low profile, thieving. But the problems, spoken about here, in verses five to ten, are clearly more serious.

And what the Lord, is commanding, is that a person, who is guilty of stealing, must put things right, in a thorough, and in depth fashion. The thief, has broken faith, not only with, the neighbor, whom he's robbed, but also with the Lord.

All sin of course, is a breach of faith, with the Lord, as well as with our neighbor. And that's how it's described, here in verse six. So, what must the thief do? Well he has something, to do towards his neighbor, first.

[26 : 50] And then second, there's something to do, towards the Lord. So let's look, at the neighbor first. He must, verse seven, confess, his sin. Now that means, that he goes, to his neighbor, and tells him, that he's wronged him.

I've come to tell you, John, that I've dealt with you, dishonestly. I've stolen from you. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I've come to put things right. You remember those, five young rams of yours, that went missing?

You asked me, if I'd seen them. I said, I hadn't. Well, I had. I took them. I took them at dusk, on the evening of your birthday party, when I knew that nobody, would be about.

And here, I've brought them back, and have added a sixth ram, from my own flock, because Moses commanded, that a further fifth, should be included. Now that's confession. I'm holding my hands up.

I did it. But to add restitution, to confession, indicates real repentance. Do you remember Zacchaeus, when he met the Lord Jesus? He'd been a thief, a crooked tax collector.

[27 : 56] Lord, he said to Jesus, if I have defrauded, anyone of anything, well, clearly he had, I restore it, fourfold. Now it is possible, of course, to make, a sort of confession, an apparent confession, which really accepts, no responsibility, and is therefore, not a real confession.

This is what Adam and Eve did, in Genesis chapter three, and their descendants, which might include you and me, have been doing it ever since. Have you eaten of that tree?

The Lord said to Adam. And Adam replies, the woman that you gave, to be with me, she gave me the fruit, and I ate. In other words, it was her fault. Generations of married men, have been taking that line, since.

But Eve does no better. What is this, that you have done? The Lord asks her. The serpent deceived me, and I ate. So Adam blames his wife, and his wife blames the serpent.

So there's no real acceptance, of responsibility. And if we refuse, to accept our responsibility, for bad behavior, our very humanity, is diminished.

[29 : 08] Think for example, of a man, who goes to prison today, for robbery. He will remain, a diminished human being, unless he accepts, responsibility for his crime. If he blames, his circumstances, or his upbringing, or his parents example, or his social worker, or the government,

or anything else, his whole being, will remain twisted, and wretched.

But when he faces, the reality of his nature, and then says, I did it, he's on the road, to maturity, and perhaps also, to Christian faith. Now our passage, also shows, that the thief, has an obligation, to the Lord, as well as to his neighbor.

He's got to bring a ram, to the priest, as a sacrifice, of atonement. And if the man has wronged, if the man that he has wronged, has now died, and has no living relatives, who can be recompensed, then verse 8 says, that the restitution payment, must go to the priest, as the Lord's representative. So the man needs to feel, the drain on his own wallet. And then it will come home to him, that he really has done, something wrong, and needs to change his ways. So this paragraph, verses 5 to 10, show us, how God in his mercy, helps the thief, to grow up, and to become, a responsible member, of the Lord's people.

Paul puts it, very similarly really, in Ephesians chapter 4, like this. Let the thief, no longer steal, but rather labor, doing honest work, with his own hands, so that he may have something, to share, with anyone in need.

[30 : 44] And this way, the repentant thief, changes, from being self-centered, to being concerned, for others. And thus he begins, to grow up, into maturity. Well let's turn now, to the final section, verses 11 to 31.

And let's keep, at the forefront, of our minds, the final words, of verse 3, that the Lord, dwells in the midst, of the camp. The whole chapter, is about the shared life, of the Lord's people, lived out, in the Lord's presence.

So it's about, relating to one another, and it's about, relating to him. Our modern world, as we know well, is constantly, trying to privatize, morality.

As though the way, we behave, has no repercussions, on those around us. It's just up to us, individually. That is a great, big deceit. The Bible teaches us, that our behavior, is done, in full view, of the Lord's gaze, and also it deeply, affects the whole community.

Now verses 5 to 10, are an unpacking, of some of the implications, of the eighth commandment.

You shall not steal. Verses 11 to 31, are an unpacking, of some of the implications, of the seventh commandment.

[31 : 56] You shall not commit adultery. Now if a Christian, married man today, suspects that his wife, is cheating on him, he's not obliged, as I see it, to get in touch, with the church leaders, and to ask them, to prepare a potion, of water, and dust, and ink, and to force his wife, to drink it, to drink it, in their presence.

Legislation of this kind, was designed, for the Israelites, to use, at that period, of history. But we would be, quite wrong, to think that this section, of Numbers 5, was not to be accepted, by us, as the word of the Lord.

It is the word, of the Lord to us. It has piercingly, important implications, for us. If we think, that it's perhaps, unfair, to married women, because it deals, with a wife, under suspicion, rather than, a husband's possible, infidelity.

We only have to turn, to the book of Proverbs, to receive some, robust teaching, about male sexual sin. The Bible covers, everything. It just doesn't cover, everything in every chapter.

So let me try, to draw out, some of the implications, of this passage. First, adultery, is God's concern. In verse 11, it's the Lord, who speaks to Moses, about these things.

[33 : 12] And in verse 16, the priest is told, to bring the suspected woman, before the Lord. And the drinking, of this bitter drink, is the Lord's way, of testing the allegation, against this woman.

And if she is guilty, the physical illness, and childlessness, childlessness, that she suffers, is the Lord's punishment. The passage doesn't say, that she will die, but that her health, will be blighted.

The swelling of the abdomen, and wasting of the thigh, indicates that she'll be, unable to have children. And the subsequent loss, of respect, amongst the people, which verse 27, speaks of.

The way the community, will then speak of her. That's a further aspect, of the Lord's displeasure, with her. Adultery, is first and foremost, a sin against the Lord. Remember what David said, in Psalm 51, after he'd committed adultery, and was then confessing it.

He says to God, against you, you only, have I sinned. He'd also sinned, against Uriah, hadn't he? And against Bathsheba, and against others.

[34 : 15] But that was the way, he perceived it rightly. It was against God, primarily, that he had sinned. Secondly, adultery harms, and defiles, the camp.

These instructions, are for the whole community, of Israel. Because the Lord, dwells there, in their midst. Now one of the great lies, that people lap up, about these things, is the lie, that adultery, will only affect, two or three people.

But it doesn't, it never does. Adultery is deeply damaging, to lots of people. It damages and distresses, the older generation, the parents, of an adulterer. It damages children, the younger generation, often deeply, and often with, long term consequences.

But it also, damages the church, the Lord's people. If a Christian man, or woman, is unfaithful in marriage, the whole church, mourns. The whole church, hangs its head in sorrow, and says, why did this thing, have to happen?

It disturbs, and distresses everybody, because everybody knows, that the Lord, is grieved, and dishonored. Our human marriages, reflect, the great marriage, between the Lord, and his people. [35 : 27] And if we break, the earthly reflection, we tarnish, the heavenly original. Then thirdly, adultery, whether actual, or suspected, brings pain, and sorrow, into a relationship, the marriage relationship, which should be full, of strength, and gladness.

Just think of this situation, here in verses 13, and 14. It is so painful. Here is a man, who is suspecting, his wife, of infidelity. What kind, of a relationship, is that?

The passage, makes clear, that his jealousy, may be completely, unfounded. In which case, he is making his wife, suffer completely, unnecessarily. So how can we, make sure, that our marriages, if we are married people, don't get into this, kind of twisted state?

Well the answer is, we must behave, in such a way, as to enable, our spouses, to trust, our fidelity, completely. Married men, married men, we must pray, that the Lord, would help us, to hate, adultery, with a consistent, hatred.

Christians need to grow, in love, for many things, but also in hatred, and this is one of the things, we must hate. We must pray, that the Lord, will give us the strength, never to flirt, by word, or by eye contact, or by touch.

[36 : 50] Internet pornography, never. What is that going, to do to a wife, if she knows, that her husband, looks at such things? She'll be dismayed, she'll be heartbroken. Marriage, is like a Ming vase, very precious, but easily broken.

Let's help one another, to develop the kind, of marriages, where husband and wife, are able to trust, each other's fidelity, very deeply, where the wife can say, I know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that my husband, is faithful to me, and where the husband, can say the same thing, about his wife.

Now fourth, if difficulties, do arise in a marriage, this passage teaches us, to take those difficulties, to the Lord.

In Numbers 5, this means, that the man and his wife, go to the priest, the priest is the Lord's representative. Now in our situation, it may be to senior people, in the church, whose advice can be trusted.

Many marriages, do go through difficult patches, and it can be a life saver, it can be a marriage saver, to go to Christian friends, for help and counsel.

[38 : 00] The time to repair a house, is when the first little cracks appear, not when the roof has caved in. Good advice, sought early on, can be exactly what is needed.

So let's not be too proud, to ask for it. It's the Lord's provision for us. Then friends, lastly, remember, the gospel.

The gospel, assures the repentant sinner, of full forgiveness. Does adultery, or some other, cause of marital breakdown, does it spell the end, of the Christian life?

Thank God, it does not. Many an adulterer, has come to the Lord, beating his breast, and asking for forgiveness. And his life, has been transformed, and set on the right path, a path of fruitful Christian service.

Just look at the very last words, of Numbers chapter 5. The last phrase, of verse 31. The woman shall bear, her iniquity. That's the woman, who is shown, by the testing ritual, to be an adulteress.

[39 : 05] She had to bear, the consequences, of her iniquity. But in our case, someone else, has borne, our iniquity, and all its consequences.

Whether it's sexual sin, or adulterous sin, all sin, every last sin, borne it, dealt with it, taken away. And his name, is Jesus.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Dear God, our Father, we want to thank you again, for the lovely pictures, you paint in the Bible, in so many ways, of the people of God, the community, the

church, those who trust you, and love you.

And we pray, that you will help, each one of us, so to love your people, so to love the church, so to love the, the temple, in which you dwell. That we're all able, to play our part, with great enthusiasm, and joy, in seeking the purity, of our shared life together.

Whether it's in marriage, or in all our community relationships. Have mercy upon us, and give us strength, and joy, as we continue, on our journey together. And we ask it, in Jesus name.

[40 : 20] Amen. Amen.