

Guarding Family Life: 2. Distinctive Purity for THE Covenant Family

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[0 : 00] If you'd take your Bibles, we're going to turn to our reading now for this morning, which is in Deuteronomy chapter 23.

And we're going to read the first half down to verse 14. And it is, as you will see, a somewhat challenging reading.

Deuteronomy 23 at verse 1. No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord.

No one born of a forbidden union may enter the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord. No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord.

Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever. Because they did not meet you with bread and water on the way when you came out of Egypt.

[1 : 05] And because they hired against you Balaam, the son of Baar, from Pethor in Mesopotamia to curse you. But the Lord your God will not listen to Balaam. Instead, the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you.

Because the Lord your God loved you. You are not to seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever. But you shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother.

You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you are a sojourner in his land. Children born to them in the third generation may enter the assembly of the Lord. When you are encamped against your enemies, then you shall keep yourself from every evil thing.

If any man among you becomes unclean because of a nocturnal emission, then he shall go outside the camp. He shall not come inside the camp. But when evening comes, he shall bathe himself in water. And as the sun sets, he may come inside the camp.

You shall have a place outside the camp, and you shall go out to it. And you shall have a trial with your tools. And when you sit down outside, you shall dig a hole with it and turn back and cover up your excrement.

[2 : 14] Because the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you. And to give up your enemies before you. Therefore, your camp must be holy.

So that he may not see anything indecent among you. And turn away from you. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Well, please do take your Bibles at Deuteronomy chapter 23, page 165, if you have one of the blue visitors' Bibles. Now, you can't read even to the end of the very first chapter of the Bible without realizing that the God that this book reveals to us is the God of life.

He is the creator of abundant, flourishing, pervasive life. And so, of course, when we come to consider the law of God, which Paul calls the law of righteousness, of rightness, then his Torah, it's a Hebrew word for law, it really means instruction.

His instruction is instruction for life. For life that is right. Fulsome. Flourishing. Abundant. And indeed, life that conquers death itself.

[3 : 33] Proverbs 12, verse 28 says, In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death. And so we've been studying together here Moses' instructions, his law for life, in these central chapters of Deuteronomy.

And he is here fleshing out and applying the core of God's instruction, the Ten Commandments, which are so concerned with life, with health, with human flourishing.

And we recently saw that great emphasis on cherishing life in the exposition of the Sixth Commandment, not to murder. That's what you find in chapters 19 to 21. But, of course, the very cradle of life is the family.

And that must, therefore, obviously also be very, very carefully protected and guarded fiercely. And so we saw these instructions on protecting the nuclear family in chapter 22, safeguarding the creation ordinance of marriage between a man and a woman.

That's why those verses teach us that sex must be pure, must never be perverted. It must never be predatory or even premature. But, of course, all through the Bible there is, as you know, a very clear link, isn't there, between the nuclear family and between the whole covenant family of God's people.

[4 : 54] That's why both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, there's a concern for right ordering, for distinctive purity of both the domestic household family and God's whole household, His family, which you'll notice here in verses 1 to 8 six times, is referred to as the assembly of the Lord, or the congregation of God's people, as some translations have it.

The ecclesia of the Lord, that's the Greek word translating this in the Greek Old Testament, where we get our word ecclesiastical. It means church, the ecclesia, the church of God.

You might remember the words that we used to have on our service sheets every week from 1 Timothy 3.15, where Paul says he is writing that you should understand how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.

And that is what our passage here this morning is all about. It's all about the distinctive purity which God's family, God's household are called to, and simply must display in this world.

I grant you, at first sight, may seem very odd. I'm not sure what you thought when we had a reading about castration and urination and defecation, among other things. Probably not quite what you were expecting this morning.

[6 : 18] I have to confess, it's unlikely to be the passage I would choose when I'm invited as a guest preacher for somebody's special service. You can imagine the email coming up. Mr. Philip, could you give us your reading for the anniversary service?

Yes, that's fine, no problem. Deuteronomy 23, verse 1. Do let me know if you need anything else. Radio silence. Who is this person that we've invited to come and preach?

I'd be surprised if you find this passage on the back catalogue of the Keswick Convention, for example. However, here it is. It's before us this morning, isn't it? And it must be God's word for us today.

And in fact, I can tell you, I have discovered that it is a vitally important word. In fact, it is actually the message the whole Bible is deeply concerned with in every place, from the very beginning to its end.

Because it's the issue of who may belong to God's household. And how we're to behave in his household when we are given a place within it.

[7 : 22] So let's try to get to grips with this by looking first at verses 1 to 8, which are all about belonging to the assembly of the Lord. Now what these verses teach us is that at its heart, God's household is an assembly that is gathered for holy worship.

That is, for real and intimate communion with the Lord himself. And that real spiritual worship, that right relationship with God, that sharing in the life of God must therefore be holy.

That is, it can only come about God's way, through obedient faith. Or to put it another way, you must wholeheartedly embrace the holiness of God and not hostility towards God, or else you can never belong among those who truly know him.

Now that is the clear apostolic command in the New Testament. Hebrews 12 verse 14 says, Very plain.

But that is precisely what these verses in front of us this morning are telling us as well, in their own very graphic way. So let's try and understand them. The emphasis here, as I've said, is on the assembly of the Lord.

[8 : 40] That is, a people who are set apart from the world for God and for God alone. Now that's the basic meaning of holy. It means set apart for God, for God's kingdom.

And that's the key to all the examples that are given here for those for whom it simply cannot be so. It's the key to understanding what is being said and what isn't being said. Let me begin by reading from Derek Kidner.

These provisions, he said, should read not as rebuffs for the handicapped, but as stipulations designed to guard the church of the Old Testament and to express in vivid physical, verse 1, social, verse 2, and historical terms, verses 3 to 8, to express its calling as a company of the redeemed without blemish or reproach, a people apart, and yet not a wholly closed community.

God's church is not a wholly closed community, even here in the Old Testament. That's so, so important. And we'll come back to that. But it was then and is now and always will be a people apart, a holy assembly to the Lord who is a holy God.

And so not all may belong truly there. If they exclude themselves by wholeheartedly embracing not God's purity, but perversity.

[10:14] The perversity of a world and a whole worldview that is opposed to God. And that's very important. The last chapter, the very last chapter of the Bible ends with that vision, doesn't it, in John's vision in Revelation.

Blessed are those who have washed their robes so that they may have the right to the tree of life, so that they may enter the city of God by its gates. But outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

And it's exactly so here in these verses. Verse 1, you see, speaks of excluding from the assembly of God those who are perversely mutilated.

There's a deep perversion, isn't there, of the natural order of God's creation of human beings as male and female. And we've seen already in chapter 22 how deeply concerning that is to God. It's an abomination to Him. And we need to take that seriously today in an age of such confusion, indeed an age of obsession in that whole area. But here it's much more even than that, you see, because almost certainly this refers to a ritual mutilation which is done as part of the worship of false gods, of pagan idols.

[11:28] Bodily mutilation was a great feature of pagan worship in that age. We've seen that already in chapter 14. Do you remember the shaving, the tattooing, the cutting of these mourning rituals and so on?

And self-mutilation was often practiced as a way to get special recognition with God, as a way to get a special status in the pagan priesthood and that sort of thing. That might seem extraordinary to us, but the truth is that false religion has always had a history of all kinds of reprehensible practices, including bodily mutilation.

Child sacrifice was a terrible feature of the pagan religion of the Canaanite day and God warns His people against that. We saw that in chapter 12. Human sacrifice, cannibalism, was a part of many such faiths.

The Incas, for example, celebrated for their buildings, but they killed people and ate them. All kinds of dreadful practices like that. Even today, we're conscious, aren't we, of female genital mutilation. Well, that's a practice that's tied up with cultural and religious practices of falsehood and of filthiness. So it's not quite as obscure as you might think.

[12:41] And it's certainly not anything at all to do with prejudice against disabilities or against certain ethnicities. This is given as a warning to Israelites, lest any of them should think that they could still remain among the assembly of the Lord's people and themselves go and take part in any of these pagan idolatrous practices.

Well, that's quite a relevant word, isn't it, for the church today? There are plenty of people in the Western world, in the professing church of Jesus Christ, who would say that embracing the practices of other religions are in some way enlightened and helpful and good for the church. Not at all, says the Bible. Remember Deuteronomy 12, verse 31. You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, because every abominable thing that the Lord your God hates, they have done in their worship of their gods.

And we should have a caution, I think, also, shouldn't we, in an age when bodily disfigurement again is becoming increasingly fashionable in all sorts of ways. We as Christians need to think hard what it means that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Our bodies, says Paul, are to be presented as living sacrifices, holy, well-pleasing to God, not conformed to the ways of this age, to the perversities of those who, in fact, would disfigure the image of God.

[14:08] So we need to think about that. And verse 2, you see, continues this theme of perverse opposition to God in this example of a child of a forbidden union. What does that mean?

It's not just speaking about an illegitimate birth. The authorized version says, no bastard shall enter the congregation of the Lord. But it's not that. It's a rare word. And almost certainly, it is talking here about a child that is conceived deliberately through ritual prostitution at an idol's temple.

In other words, it's a child that is born and dedicated in life to the service of a false god. Think about it as a sort of reverse perversion of the birth of Samuel.

Do you remember Samuel's mother prayed, and the Lord granted him a child, and she dedicated Samuel to the Lord's service for all of his life? Well, this is exactly that, but it's to a pagan, filthy, idolatrous false god.

And that's the point. And since that antipathy, that opposition to the true God would run in families, well, it's understandable that he says none of that ilk could ever possibly be at one with the true people of God, even to the tenth generation.

[15:22] That's a way of speaking about it as far as you can possibly imagine, forever. That might seem harsh, but here's the truth, friends. If, as parents, you're hostile to God, and you're utterly committed to a worldview that is opposed to God's way in every way, and you're determined to dedicate your children also to that lifestyle and that way of look, that outlook on life, then it is highly likely that they will embrace that same falsehood, isn't it?

And that'll go on down the generations. And it's salutary for all parents here, for all prospective parents, because we are living not just for ourselves, but we're living for our children. And your children will learn to worship your idols.

It's a frightening truth. If your real idols are football, or fashion, or money, or career, or whatever it is, whatever it is that really eclipses your worship of the true God in your life, that will be what you're training your children in.

Can't help it. That is what you will be dedicating their lives to, these idols. That's why we need to be careful, isn't it? If you're paying lip service to the one true God in your Sunday best, but actually you're giving your life service to other gods, then you need to be warned.

Not only may you very well be excluding yourself from the assembly of the Lord, from fellowship with Him, but very likely you'll be excluding your children, your grandchildren. We need that warning.

[16:55] All of us. The gospel warns us in that way. We can't prostitute ourselves with the pleasures of the temples of this world, and preserve ourselves for the purpose of the temple of the Lord.

It's just not possible. What fellowship has light with darkness, says Paul? What agreement has the temple of the Lord with idols? We are the temple of the living God.

And again, that point is made again in verses 3 to 6, you see, with this question of the perverse hostility of Moab and Ammon against God's people, and therefore against God Himself, of course. But notice verses 7 and 8 concerning Edom and Egypt, which makes it absolutely clear, again, that this exclusion is not about excluding all foreigners, but rather excluding those who showed and who continue to show extreme hostility and opposition to God and to His people and to the advance of His kingdom in the world.

You can read the story in Numbers 22 to Numbers 24. It's what verse 4 speaks about here. Not only did the Moabites not help Israel when they were coming out of Egypt, but they went to extreme lengths to harm them.

[18:08] They hired Balaam to curse them. And of course, God extraordinarily turned that curse into a blessing for Israel, but look at verse 6 here. The curse became attached to those who would have cursed forever, says verse 6, so that even to the 10th generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever.

Now, friends, if you think, but hang on, this is just the harshness of the Old Testament speaking here. I need to remind you, don't I, of Jesus' words. Read Matthew chapter 25 later on about the sheep and the goats.

It's not, by the way, a passage speaking about the neglect of the church in caring for the world's poor, as so often people seem to take it. It is precisely the opposite.

It's a passage strongly challenging and indicting the peoples of this world for hating and for not loving the people of the Lord Jesus Christ, the brothers of Jesus himself.

And Jesus says, when you didn't feed them, when you didn't clothe them, when you didn't help them, when you didn't visit them in prison, the least of these my brothers, you neglected to do all these things to me.

[19 : 23] And it is these, says Jesus, who will go out into everlasting punishment. Depart from, these are his words, depart from me, you curse, into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

Jesus' words, excluded forever, just like verse 6 here in front of us. Not, notice, not because of their ethnic background, but because of their evil behavior towards God and his kingdom.

Whereas, you see, as verses 7 and 8 show, it need not be so. The Edomites, even though very often they were enemies of God's people, and Egypt also, great enemies, although before that they had succored them.

If they sought a place, honestly, among the people of God, they could be admitted, ultimately, to the assembly of the Lord. Not excluded by birth, but admitted by faith and trust in the true God, if indeed that faith was true and genuine.

That's the point of the third generation here. By the time you've had your children and grandchildren, well, it's obvious then that you really do mean business. The Bible's never naive about these things. It's not just saying, oh yes, I've become a Christian.

[20 : 34] No, no, no, no, no. New Testament is just as clear, isn't it? Jesus says it's those who abide in me, who keep my commands, and are fruitful that are truly mine. It's those who endure to the end, who are saved.

That's the Bible's constant message. It's exactly the message of this chapter. To really belong to the assembly of the Lord, the gathering of the redeemed, to really worship God in truth, to know him, means wholeheartedly embracing his holiness, his way, in persistent, real submission to him and to him alone.

To have an undivided heart. That's how the Apostle James puts it. Fearing God alone, not sharing him with a whole lot of idols of this world. Not sharing him with those who actually are utterly opposed to him.

Draw near to God, says James, and he will draw near to you. But that means, he says, cleansing your hands, purifying your hearts. From double-mindedness.

Means embracing holiness, not hostility to God. Humble yourselves, he says, before God, and he will exalt you to that place of real fellowship with him.

[21 : 45] That's the only way to belong in intimate fellowship with the Lord. Because God opposes the pride, says James. Those who think you can live perversely and still love God purely.

No, no, no. He gives grace to the humble who submit themselves wholeheartedly to him. Knowing the truth of the old hymn that says there is a city bright, but closed are its gates to sin.

Not that defile it shall ever enter in. That's the message of the whole Bible. And it's exactly the message here of verses 1 to 8 of our chapter about those who can belong to the assembly of the Lord.

And the theme of holiness is exactly the same when we look at the second half, verses 9 to 14, which is all about behavior in the army of the Lord. What this section reminds us is that God himself is an, God's household is an army gathered for holy war.

And the real power in the midst who wins those battles is the spirit of the living God himself. And that means that all true spiritual warfare also must be marked by holiness.

[22 : 58] That it must acknowledge God's priorities. That it must acknowledge God's presence in the midst of his people. You see, verse 9 here gives the general command to holiness.

Verses 10 to 14 just give two examples to show in a practical way what that means and what it's symbolized by. So verse 9, you see, is saying, in effect, this. It's saying, the battles of the Lord must be holy.

And you must keep yourself from any taint of unholiness. You must do God's kingdom work in God's kingdom way. Because, look at verse 14, it is God's work.

It's God who's doing it. He really is in the midst of his people. His spirit really is in the midst of your camp. And by the way, notice six times the reference to camp, the camp of the Lord, just as the word to the reference of the assembly of the Lord in the first half.

And God's spirit is the Holy Spirit. And so just as Paul says to the Ephesian church in his letter to them, which is all about battles, isn't it? All about being armed for real spiritual warfare.

[24 : 03] Still, he says to them, their walk, their camp, if you like, is to be one worthy of the calling that you have received. You're to be walking in the light and the love of the Lord, not like the pagan world.

You're to walk as children of light, not as darkness. There's to be no hint among you, says Paul, of any impurity, any immorality, any filthiness, any crudity, any corruption.

Read Ephesians 4 and 5. That's what he says. Walk, he is saying to them, march even to war as children of light. For the fruit of light, he says, is found in all that is good and right and true.

Well, isn't that just exactly what's being said here? It's holiness. It's not health that's the chief concern of these regulations. Although, as Chris Wright points out, if you're looking for a Bible reference to back up the old adage that cleanliness is next to godliness, then probably this is quite a good one.

But actually, they are related, aren't they? Because holiness is wholesomeness. It's about health. It's about wholesome humanity. It's about the humanity that is embodied above all in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 15] And hence, you see, these instructions here that we find a bit embarrassing about bodily functions, about toileting. Verse 9, you see, when it speaks about avoiding every evil thing, it's not talking here about moral wickedness.

It's talking about immodesty. It's talking about unseemliness, inappropriate behavior, even when you have to answer the call of nature, which everybody has to do. And that's what it's about.

Verse 10 is talking, I think, about urination, almost certainly. Some people think it's the same as Leviticus 15, verse 16, but that's a different matter, a different language, and so on.

And the context, I think, is clear. Verses 12 to 13 are clear. They express, they talk about excrement, don't they? It's quite difficult to find just the right language to use here publicly. I want to avoid unnecessary crudeness, but I also want to avoid the sort of titters of using the language of the nursery.

So I'm just going to take refuge in the old medical euphemisms of the consulting room. We're talking here about passing water and moving bowels. But it's quite clear, isn't it? It's a natural thing.

[26 : 19] It's a necessary thing in life. It's nothing evil in themselves. But, in the Lord's army, God is saying, extra care and thought is needed even there because, verse 14, God himself walks in the midst of your camp.

He is the great fighter for you. And he is holy. And so you must be holy too. He mustn't see anything indecent lest, look, lest he turn away from you.

And that would be total disaster, wouldn't it? And even around about the camp, he says there in verse 13, there's to be absolutely no danger of the Holy Lord of Heaven being sullied by treading in some human filth.

I mean, you can't have a more vivid image than that. But he is saying, isn't he, just what Paul is saying to the Ephesian church, don't grieve away the spirit of the living God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

God cannot and will not dwell among a people tainted by filth. The filth of bitterness and wrath and anger and slander and malice is what Paul is talking about to the Ephesians.

[27 : 27] But just so here, that's what these graphic examples signify to us. He's not saying that these are the only things that God cares about, physical filth. That's nasty, but it can be washed off.

That's the symbolism, isn't it, of verse 11 there. These things can be cleansed. But it's the attitude that these things represent. A careless attitude completely to the presence of God.

A scorn for the majesty of God and for His holiness. That's what it's about. There's nothing wrong in itself if you're camping, just nipping out to the front of the tent and revealing yourselves just right outside the door.

Let me tell you, as somebody who's camped in the wilds of Africa, ask Charles, he'll tell you. You want to keep one foot inside that tent, you might need to get back in pretty quickly. But imagine your camp is the camp of the royal guards of Her Majesty the Queen.

and you're feeling a bit caught short. But Her Majesty might just be out for a pre-bedtime walk with the corgis. Well, you'll think again, won't you? You won't have that cocoa before bedtime.

[28 : 32] You'll hunker down in that tent until it's safe in the morning. Well, I hope so, anyway. I hope there's respect for Her Majesty the Queen. But how much more for the Lord of heaven and earth?

See, somebody's put it this way, habits and attitudes that in ordinary circumstances are unimportant assume an entirely different significance in His presence. Because our priorities must be shaped, mustn't they, by the presence of the King and by the priorities of His kingdom advance, which is a

matter of waging His warfare, which is a holy warfare, in His way of utter holiness.

This is telling us that there's a beauty of holiness that must pervade even the battle camp of the Lord our God. Because we really do know the joy of His real presence in the midst of us.

It's the same message, isn't it, in Revelation 1-3 where there's that picture of the Lord walking among the lampstands that represent the churches of Christ. He is in the midst of us. And that changes everything.

It affects everything we do and it affects the way that we must do everything as His church, the way even that we do battle, the way that we fight. It must be marked by holiness, by wholesomeness, even in the bitterest and darkest battle.

[29 : 59] Paul says that we are people who are to spread the fragrance of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yes, he says, some people will oppose it, but it's not to be opposed on the grounds of them finding some indecency, some filth in the midst of our camp.

That is, our message of the gospel may offend and will offend, but our manner is not to be carelessly offensive. We are not to emanate pride and conceit and anger and hatred and so on as God's people.

We are not to emanate anything filthy or disgusting. Our warfare is not to be the way of harsh haranguing and protest. It's to be the way of humble, honest persuasion.

That's the apostolic teaching. We are not to be people who go about doing dreadful things like waving placards saying God hates faggots, things like that. Never.

We are to be a people who go calling urgently all people to honor the way of God's holiness along with us as we do the same. See, never, never let there be that nasty aroma of unburied excrement around the church of Jesus Christ in the world today which is his camp, the church militant doing his warfare.

[31 : 21] That's a lesson some Christians need to learn, isn't it? It's one that we all need to remember especially when we do have to fight great gospel battles. If we want the Lord himself not to be grieved away from us because he won't be part of something that is unholy.

Let me say one more thing on this business of God's eye always looking at his people, being on his people because that is sometimes something that induces great fear. Listen to William still on this. He says, our guilt-ridden minds tend to regard his perpetual inspection as an overshadowing threat like the stab of guilt that we have when we merely see a policeman. But we should rather think of this divine oversight as part of God's search for pleasure in his children.

Certainly that's what he hopes for and that's what he longs for. It's the good not the bad that he's looking for hopefully. Look at verse 14. He walks among his people as their deliverer, as their saviour, not their destroyer because he wants to be delighted in us.

He doesn't want to be disgusted in us. He's looking for the good. He's looking for a holy people. And that is the camp and that is the church that he will always honour with his presence and with his power to deliver, to banish enemies, to bring his great peace.

[32 : 49] See how there's nothing negative about God's holiness. God's call of grace is that we should belong to his holy people, a people who are set apart for him and a people who behave like him as his holy ones.

That's how our camp is to advance the glory of God on this earth. There is a negative necessary in that call. Of course there is. The gates of God's assembly are firmly closed to sin, firmly closed to persistent hostility against him.

That has to be so. But it's that very negative, isn't it, that makes the overwhelmingly positive call of God's grace just so visible and so wonderful.

Turn with me as we draw to our close. Turn with me to Psalm 24 that we began the service with. I think it's page 458 in the church Bibles. And listen again to verse 3 and the question, Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

Who shall stand in his holy place? That's our question, isn't it? Who can truly belong to God's own household, to his intimate family, to the assembly of the Lord?

[34 : 00] And the answer is there in verse 4, Only he who has clean hands and a pure heart. And we can read that in despair. We can say, Oh, that can't be me because my hands are not clean.

Think of all the things that I have done and my heart. Oh my goodness, how far from pure that is if only you could know. No, no, no! That is completely wrong.

Read this song. We think it means only the perfect person could ever enter God's true family in his assembly. That is not what this says. Look at verse 4 again.

The second line tells us, doesn't it, what it means to have clean hands and a pure heart. It means, he says, not lifting up your soul to what is false. It's one of the Old Testament words for idols, false gods.

And it means not swearing deceitfully. That is not taking God's name and claiming you serve him but actually doing it deceitfully because at heart you are really serving false gods.

[35 : 01] Just as the people in verses 1 to 8 in our passage are. Now look at verse 6. Instead, the Holy One, the One whose hands are clean and heart is pure, is the One who seeks wholeheartedly only the face of the God of Jacob.

Verse 5 says, he will receive blessing from the Lord. He will receive righteousness from the God of his salvation. Do you see? True holiness is not about being perfect.

It's not about being sinless for us in this world. Not at all. What it is all about is seeking wholeheartedly and only the face of the true God of Jacob, the God of grace who revealed himself absolutely and completely in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wherever you've come from, wherever you've been, whoever you are. And that's why the whole Old Testament even here shows us that God's household is not closed wholly.

It is closed to those who only seek sin but it is open to sinners who will only seek him. Not every cult prostitute, not every Moabite was excluded forever from the assembly of the Lord.

[36 : 15] Read on into Joshua and you'll read of one called Rahab, a cult prostitute of the temples of idols who turned from that and threw in her lot with the God of Israel and her people. Then there was Ruth the Moabitess and she came inside among the Lord's people calling on the name of the Lord.

Your God shall be my God and your God my people. And many, many others. And as the story of God's people went on and on towards fulfillment, the prophets made it ever more clear of the scope and the wideness of God's great invitation to join in with his people.

Isaiah the prophet in chapter 56 said these words, For soon my salvation will come, says the Lord. And let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, The Lord will reject me from his people.

And let not the eunuch, the man whose testicles are crushed, let not him say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus, says the Lord, to the eunuchs who hold fast to my covenant, I will give in my house within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters, an everlasting name that will never be cut off.

Even Jeremiah speaks about, would you believe, Moabites and Ammonites in that great day being restored. Lord, and the great mighty day of the Lord comes.

[37 : 37] And at last the Lord of heaven himself came near, so near, taking our own flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ to destroy forever all wickedness and to call to belong forever to his great assembly, men and women, boys and girls from every nation who by nature would be excluded forever from his presence because of sin and unholiness but who through Jesus Christ are made holy or justified by the spirit of our God.

And when you read in the New Testament the book of Acts the good news of Jesus begins to go out from Jerusalem to the very ends of the earth. The very first pagan Gentile that we encounter is who? The Ethiopian eunuch who's going along in his chariot reading from the very scroll of Isaiah where that extraordinary promise to people like him is found and he was brought in made holy.

And then you have Saul of Tarsus worse than any Moab or Ammonite breathing out cursings against God and his people and he is brought in to belong to the household of God.

And then a whole household of pagan people under Cornelius is brought in and every one of them washed and no one could deny that the spirit of the holy God has been poured out even on pagan Gentile outsiders.

And then the whole city of Ephesus is full of the smoke of burning books from occultists and Satanists and idol worships burning everything that belonged to the past and coming in to belong to the everlasting assembly of the holy.

[39 : 19] Grace abounding even to the chief of sinners as Paul described himself. not because holiness doesn't matter any longer to God not because just anyone or anything now can come into the assembly of the Lord no no nothing unclean shall ever enter it says John nor anyone who does what is detestable or false.

Paul is just as clear isn't they don't be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality nor thieves nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers none of these will ever inherit the kingdom of God closed are its gates to sin but open open still while there is time are those gates to sinners who repent who will seek the face of the God of Jacob and him alone because such were some of you says Paul to them but you were washed you were made holy you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God who can belong to the assembly of the Lord our God who could come in to that household of everlasting joy only the one who has clean hands and a pure heart but that means friends according to every promise of this book that means everyone who will call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ single-mindedly wholeheartedly rejecting all other not any longer lifting up their eyes to what is false but seeking the face of the God of Jacob alone whose smile radiates now to all the world in the face of our glorious

Lord Jesus Christ and if perhaps this morning you think and you are here that somehow God would be reluctant to ever receive somebody like you into his household his assembly his family because of what you once were because of what you still are or because of what you have done or because of what some people have done to you you need to know you need to know that there is nothing on this earth that causes more joy to God in heaven than when someone who has been outside his assembly comes inside to belong forever to his household of joy Jesus himself says there is joy among the angels of heaven over every one sinner who repents and comes to find their true home in the household of God in the assembly of the Lord well may there be great joy in heaven this very day because of that reason let's pray our God and Father as we think on your awesome holiness you cannot look upon sin and filth how we marvel at the depth and the breadth of your extraordinary grace and mercy that calls us not to a closed door but to an open gate and the way in to a father's heart to a cleansing and a joy that is everlasting may every heart here this morning we pray know and be filled with that joy through through our

Lord Jesus Christ ■ for our Exodus p which may be ■■■ so