

Reflecting God the Abundant Giver: 3. Generous Advocates of his Kindness

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now this morning to our reading in the Bibles, and you'll find that in the Old Testament in the book of Deuteronomy. If you have one of our church visitors Bibles, I think that's page 166, Deuteronomy chapter 25.

We're continuing our studies here in Moses' exposition of God's instruction for life for his people. That's what the Ten Commandments are. And all through the rest of Deuteronomy, having given those in chapter 5, he is teasing them out.

It's a very concise document, isn't it, the Ten Commandments? But Moses is explaining them, applying them to life, showing us what these basic principles for godly living mean.

And he does that by all sorts of different examples, some of them really quite unusual as the ones we're going to read this morning. But in every one, showing us how extensive and how pervasive God's commands are for our every breath and for our every action in life.

So here we are, chapter 25 and verse 5. Herman ed.

[1 : 34] that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. Notice that language, blotted out. And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gates, to the elders, and say, my husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel.

He will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me. Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying, I do not wish to take her, then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders publicly, and pull the sandal off his foot and spit in his face.

And he shall answer and shall say, so shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house. And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, the house of him who had his sandal pulled off.

When men fight with one another, and the wife of the one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of him who's beating him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the private parts, then you shall cut off her hand.

Your eye shall have no pity. You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small.

[3 : 07] A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. For all who do such things, who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the Lord your God.

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt. Now he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you. He did not fear God.

Therefore, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you in the land, the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.

You shall not forget. Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, please turn with me, if you would, to Deuteronomy 25, page 166, if you have a church Bible.

A passage teaching us how to be generous advocates of God's kindness. Now, some Christians, perhaps many Christians, seem to think that the Old Testament is all about external matters, commands about outward behavior and so on.

[4 : 29] Whereas the New Testament, of course, is all about internal realities of the heart. Well, let me say, you could hardly have a more fundamental misunderstanding of the Bible, or indeed of the

whole Christian faith than that.

Because as we've seen all through our studies in Moses and his law, that from the very beginning, God has desired the hearts of his people. He's wanted loyalty to him, loyalty to his commands to be written on their hearts.

So in chapter five, in the Decalogue, when Israel responded with reverent awe to all that God had said at Sinai, God said, Oh, that my people had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep my commands.

And the greatest command, as Jesus called it, was to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and strength. And these words, says Moses, are to be on your heart.

So his plea is the same, isn't it? All the way through this book. Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn. Lay up these words of mine on your heart, so that you'll love the Lord your God with all your heart and walk in his ways and hold fast to him.

[5 : 43] It's all about the heart. And all God's commands at their heart are a matter for our hearts. Because it's the desires of the heart that drive ultimately the deeds of the body.

But here in our passage today, we come to instructions and laws that focus very clearly on this realm of motivation. As one scholar puts it, on areas that are beyond the court.

Because we're dealing with here, Moses pressing home and applying in these various examples, the whole substance of the 10th commandment. Thou shalt not covet. And of course, this command, which takes us deep into the unseen realms of the heart, are really the things that underlie all the commandments.

Because as James reminds us, it's desire, isn't it? Deep within us, which grows, and eventually gives birth to fully formed sin. And what the 10th commandment teaches us, is that these desires for sin, are themselves sinful.

Even when they're but tiny embryos, deep in our hearts, unseen, unheard, and as yet unexpressed. Of course, not all desires are wrong.

[7 : 01] We're talking about desires for what God has forbidden. And that means things that are wrong in themselves, like a forbidden sexual relationship. In chapter 5 in the command, that's what's instance.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. But of course, that includes all other forbidden sexual relationships, which of course are all sexual relationships, other than marriage between a man and a woman.

But it's also desires for things which are good in themselves, but which you seek in a wrong way. So, your neighbor's field, property that isn't yours, or his servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Notice how even in the original command itself, God removes any wriggle room at all, because he knows just how corrupt we are, and how quickly we look for exceptions. But you see, all such desires against God's commands and his will, are ultimately expressions of hearts that are not towards God in love and worship, but are away from God, in hatred and in anti-worship.

It's the very opposite of loving God with all your heart and soul and strength. And therefore, loving your neighbor as yourself. You're hating your neighbor when you covet what he has for yourself.

[8 : 20] And you're showing that your heart is not in fact turned upwards to God in worship, but turned inwards towards yourself. It's idolatrous self-worship when you covet.

And that means hating the Lord your God. That's why in Colossians 3 verse 5, Paul says that covetousness is idolatry, false worship, anti-worship. And the great minds of the church have always identified this as the very heart, the very root of sin.

This self-love, which is the antithesis of true love to God. And is incurvatus in se. That's how Augustine put it. It means wholly turned in upon himself.

And Martin Luther, of course, took up that theme famously in his exposition of Romans, where he says that man is so curved in upon himself, that he uses not only physical, but even spiritual goods for his own purposes.

He seeks only himself. He says our nature is so corrupt, that it turns even the best gifts of God towards ourselves completely.

[9 : 31] So we're just using God to get what we want. But he says that in doing that, we fail even to realize that we so wickedly, curvidly, and viciously seek all things, even God for our own sake.

We don't even realize. That's because, as he says, when quoting the prophet Jeremiah, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt.

And friends, if you don't think that's true, if you don't think that's really true of yourself, then I need to tell you, you haven't really begun to understand the gospel yet. You certainly haven't begun to understand God, and you do not understand yourself.

But God does understand our hearts. He says through Jeremiah, chapter 17, you may not understand your own deceitful hearts, but I, the Lord, search the heart, and test the mind.

And that is what he's doing here, in Moses' words, as God's servant lays out, what it means for God's people to have their hearts turned, not inwards on themselves, but upward to their God, who is the abundant giver, and therefore outward towards their fellows.

[10:48] As not covetous, not grabbing, not selfish self-worshippers, but selfless, and generous advocates of God's abundant kindness.

And so Moses takes three examples, by way of application of this anti-covetous thinking, to guide our reflection on the principles of this. The deep and exclusive bonds of family, and then the very intimate area of fertility, and then the very extensive relationships of fairness, in any trade and commerce.

And he makes the point to us, that those who are truly God's people, will be generous advocates of his kindness, in all these areas, and therefore by implication in all other areas of life.

We shall have truly caring homes, and careful hands, and indeed clean hearts. So first look at verses 5 to 10 here. God is telling us that his people must have no callousness in the realm of family.

But rather God's people are to have truly caring homes. Not selfish plundering, but rather protecting your brother's spiritual inheritance. The situation described here in verse 5, is known as leverite marriage.

[12:08] You may have heard of it, it's from the Latin term lever, just meaning brother-in-law. Everything in theology is Latin, you know, because it sounds better that way. Anyway, it was a thing that was quite common, actually, in the ancient Near East.

And it was there to protect, it was there to care for a vulnerable wife, to prevent a loss of property, to prevent impecunity, if her husband died. And it's assumed here.

And it's picked up by God's law. And it shouldn't surprise us that God can affirm certain cultural concerns that are good ones.

And preserving and protecting the family is a vital human concern in God's eyes. It's vital for the preservation, for the health, for the stability of any society on earth.

That's why the massive assault that we've seen over the past 50 years or so in Western society must be seen for what it is. It's a direct attack on the very nature of humanity itself.

[13:08] A very great attack on the nature of God himself when you attack and don't preserve the human family. It's come in all sorts of different guises, of course. First of all, with militant feminism and the sexual liberation movement, then with the homosexual lobby.

Nowadays, the manifestation is particularly this aggressive gender change ideology which we're facing today. But the target of all of these is the same in the end. It's the destruction of the natural human family.

It's the disfiguring of what God has made. And friends, the more it succeeds, and I think we have to admit it, is succeeding very greatly in the Western world today, the more it succeeds, the more our society will implode.

And the more social and relational and misery and mess there's going to be all around our society. And that's what we're seeing, is it not, in the Western world today? Our societies are showing grave signs of instability all over the place. We shouldn't be surprised at that.

[14:11] The family is so vital to the cohesion of human life. But the ancient world was not nearly so foolish as we are today. And so this custom was just one example of family protection in action.

It seems strange to us. It's very alien to us. But not in that world. But why the particular example here? Why such stern commands to do it if this was something that was recognized?

By the way, notice, actually, it's quite restricted here. There's no question of a brother sharing wives. That's forbidden repeatedly in the law. It's if a brother dies.

And it's only if he has no son. And it's only if these brothers are living together. That is, they're making common cause on their farm, on their land.

They're partners together in the livelihood of the whole household. Well, that's the clue, I think, to this law here. If you go back to Numbers 27, don't go now, but read it later on, you'll see that there's provision there for what would happen if somebody dies and they don't have progeny.

[15:22] The answer is, a brother might very well be able to inherit everything that the man leaves behind. So the point is, a brother could potentially benefit materially here if that widow had to go off elsewhere and leave the family plot, go back to her own house or whatever it was.

But, you see, if she were to have a son and an heir, then that brother might lose out. So there's gain, potentially, for him in not taking this family responsibility.

If you read Ruth chapter 4 later on, it helps to sort of spell out what's going on here. It's not exactly the same situation. In that case, it's a more distant relative who was called upon to help Ruth.

Boaz, remember, goes to the man and says, you're the kinsman redeemer. You've got the right to buy back the dead Elimelech's property. But the man declines because, as Boaz says to him, I'm quoting, the day you buy that field, you also acquire Ruth, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead and his inheritance.

And the man says, I cannot redeem it myself lest I imperil my own inheritance. You see, he didn't want rival heirs of this other man to potentially have a share with his own sons in their inheritance.

[16:47] Lest I imperil my own inheritance. So it becomes a matter of selfish greed overcoming selfless generosity.

No matter if your sister-in-law suffers loss and indeed, no matter if your dead brother suffers loss. And in fact, that is the key emphasis here. Look at verse 6. The whole purpose is that the widow, you see, will have a son who will have the right and the name of the dead husband.

That's the key thing. And the law is explicit about that goal because, of course, a man might sinfully want to exploit the situation selfishly for his own good.

That was what happened in the story of Onan. You might remember back in Genesis chapter 38. He took his dead brother's wife and he enjoyed the sex but he spilled his seed as the Bible rather graphically puts it.

He used contraception to prevent a child being born to that woman, to possess the name and the inheritance of the dead father. He took his brother's wife and he took his brother's land.

[17:54] He was doubly covetous. And for that, you read in Genesis 38, the Lord put him to death. Now you see, this is not to allow a man to be selfish over a woman, to gain for himself, but it's for a man to be selfless, to give to his brother, to give progeny so that, verse 6, his brother's name may not be blotted out of Israel.

Note that phrase, blotted out. It's an unusual one. It's a very strong one. When it's used in the Bible, it really means something of more than temporal significance, but something of eternal significance. You'll see it brackets our whole passage today. It's here, there, at the beginning and it's there also in verse 19 at the end. Blotting out the name of Amalek and his memory from under heaven. That's a judgment of eternal significance.

And you see, the whole passage here is focusing on names either being written into the future of God's story and his kingdom and his people forever or being blotted out from that forever.

So you see, the whole issue is not just about one of material significance and welfare, but it's one of spiritual significance and welfare. Because there's no greater terror, no greater tragedy than to have your name ultimately blotted out of the future of God's kingdom and his people forever, is there?

[19:22] And you see, that's why verses 7 to 10 here heaps such shame on a brother who, as verse 7 puts it, refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel.

For his own material gain, he's willing to inflict not just material loss on his sister-in-law, but grave spiritual loss on his brother's household. Refusing, as verse 9 says, refusing to build up his brother's house, to edify his brother's house, is the word the Greek Old Testament uses there.

It's the same word used all through the New Testament about building up God's household, his spiritual family of living stones among whom he has chosen to dwell forever. Now, obviously, a practice like this was going to be impossible to enforce in a sort of legal manner.

How can you? It can hardly be done in public or by force. It's delicate, isn't it? It's sensitive. It would involve awkwardness and adjustment. It was rightly something that had to be dealt with decently and privately.

So you can't enforce it by the court. Hence, though, the very clear sense of shame and opprobrium for a man if he refused to accept this duty and responsibility.

[20 : 44] That's the business of the sandal. The sandal being handed over was the way you sealed a property transaction. Again, Ruth chapter 4 describes all of that. But here, verse 9, you see the public removal in front of the elders indicated this man's refusal to transact as he should do.

Refusal to take up his responsibility. And therefore, this indicates that he loses clearly and publicly all rights to do with his brother's household and his wife. There's no way he can go and do an onan. Don't think that. No, no, no. And it shows them by spitting in his face what the whole community thinks of that selfishness. And surely, it's very clear what God's message is.

His people are to show no callousness towards family, but real caring. Certainly not using misfortune to selfishly plunder from your brother, but rather to be ready and willing and willing to do everything you can selflessly to protect both his material interests and above all his spiritual inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Even if that means forgoing material gain for yourself. Even if that costs you very greatly. Well, this custom of leverite marriage is at a great distance from us today.

[22 : 07] Seems very foreign, but the principles are very, very clear, aren't they? And I think they give us plenty to think about. I'll mention just a couple of things, but first, just note the comment that Derek Kidner makes about this, where he says that this law incidentally shows us that physical descent was not everything.

Family was not merely a genetic, but a legal and a spiritual entity. And its continuance didn't depend on the single thread of heredity. And he notes that twice in our Lord's ancestry, this provision came into effect back in Genesis 38 and also in the story of Ruth.

And I think, for one thing, that ought to be a real encouragement to those families where there's been adoption, because there's more to family for God than mere genetics. And above all, a Christian family is a spiritual entity.

In fact, God is the great adopter, isn't he, of those who had no genetic right, no natural right to be in his family, to assume the full joys and benefits of sonship in his family.

And I think it's a reminder also that it's possible for all God's people, Christian people, to have many children, even if perhaps they don't have the joy of natural children of their own.

[23 : 21] But they can be part of building up the spiritual heritage of brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoicing in that privilege, which is indeed the privilege and the responsibility of all God's people. people.

But there's a great encouragement in very practical ways for us. It's one of the great New Testament commands, isn't it? Not to let selfish pride puff ourselves up, but rather to let love build up the family of God, the people of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But I think there's also a real challenge here to all of us, and that is that real care for our families, our own families, is something that's very important to God.

And that includes our in-laws who become our family by marriage. Now, we joke a lot, don't we, about in-laws? And I've no doubt that it is an area of tension in many marriages and families, but be careful.

God clearly sees that family by marriage is family, and it brings duties of care and commitment. And if you ignore those, let me tell you, God will be against you.

[24 : 31] Read 1 Timothy 5 later on, especially verses 3 to 8, which end this, if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially the members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than the pagans.

So we need to be careful. There are quite a lot of Christians I know whose attitudes to their in-laws are deeply sinful. But the Lord is plain.

Honor your father and mother, and that includes fathers and mothers in law. And remember, says Paul, that is the first command with the promise that it may go well with you, and the obverse surely is likewise the same.

Yes, of course, there may be many frustrations, and of course, honoring does not mean indulging them or putting up with all kinds of utterly unreasonable behavior. But we need to be careful about our attitude of heart.

Paul is very strong. An attitude that is wrong here means that you have denied the faith. It means you are worse than the pagans. What can that mean if it's not something pretty dreadful?

[25 : 42] But maybe the most important thing for us to think about in all of this is the great priority here of building up a brother's spiritual inheritance, not just caring about his material needs and that

of his family.

I guess, and I hope, that all the parents here have thought about what will happen to their children if they should untimely die, and especially if both parents should die. I hope as responsible parents we've thought about things like life insurance and so on to provide for their needs materially.

But what about their spiritual future? Who will look after your children if you both die? Will it be your natural family? Well, what about if they're not Christian believers?

Who is going to protect their spiritual heritage? You might think that the best, the most natural provision is that, especially if they've got the wherewithal to do all of that. But isn't your children's spiritual inheritance by far the most important thing?

That their name not be blotted out of Israel? Isn't that a far greater consideration? Now, I know that some of you have made careful provision for exactly that situation with fellow believers, some of them within the fellowship here.

[26 : 55] And put it into your wills that they will take your children so that it won't be contested and so on. And I commend that attitude to all of you with children, all of you who think about having children.

And of course, there's a great challenge to others too, isn't there? Because will you be willing to take on that duty if somebody asks you to do it for their children? That's a thought. Especially if perhaps you just finally got to the point where you've thought, hallelujah, I've done all that now. Well, what if somebody asks you to do it all over again for your brother or your sister for their spiritual inheritance? There's a lot to think about, isn't there, for us as a church family? Are we going to be callous about our brother's spiritual inheritance or truly caring?

Now, verses 11 and 12, you see, are actually in the same vein. God's people are to be generous advocates of his kindness. And if that's so, then there must be no carelessness in the realm of fertility.

But rather, God's people, and quite literally here, are to have careful hands. Not selfishly damaging, but defending our neighbor's natural heritage as well.

[28 : 10] That's what this rather graphic situation is all about here. A woman is certainly standing by her man here, as Dolly Parton might put it, but she's going rather too far.

And the reason for this very severe punishment is not just indecency, but it's to do with the fact that she is damaging the posterity of another man by putting his future fertility at risk in this violent attack.

So there's a clear link, isn't there, to the verses above. There, a woman's reproductive rights are cherished and protected, but here, it's the man's.

And you've even to protect them if he's giving your husband a beating. Now, let me just be clear here, to the wives here. It's a very good thing if your husband is getting a beating to step in and do your bit to try and protect him.

Don't misunderstand. But, the end doesn't quite justify the means. And that's why there's such a severe penalty here in verse 12.

[29 : 15] And, of course, we balk at this. It's a very strange thing and it's actually very out of keeping, isn't it, with all the rest of the Mosaic law because there's no hint of mutilation as a punishment anywhere else in the law.

There's certainly no record in the Old Testament of anything like this ever being done. And so I think it seems likely that this was never actually thought to be a literal punishment as expressed in this particular way.

In fact, when you look at the language, the word for hand that's used here isn't the ordinary language. And I think what's being expressed here is another example of the principle of the lex talionis, the eye for an eye, the tooth for a tooth.

The proportionality in justice that is to be exact. See, the word hand here is a word that's used often euphemistically for the female sex organs.

You'll find it used like that in the poetry in Song of Songs, for example. It's actually quite a common thing all through the Old Testament for one part of the body to be used for the more private parts of the body so as to express it decently.

[30 : 20] So, in the authorised version when a man goes into a cave to cover his feet, that's got as much to do with feet as spending a penny as to do with pennies, if you understand what's being said.

And so I think what is being said here in a sort of restrained and decent way is that if you do that to somebody else's private parts, the same is going to come to you.

And the point is that it's meant to make you wince, make your eyes water and you get the message and you think, oh my goodness, I'll never do that then. It's more a deterrent, I think, than an actual punishment that's ever expected to be inflicted.

It's unimaginable. That's the point. You're to take this as seriously as if that were happening to you, even if it's an enemy who's beating your husband. Could be that it's meant to be thought of metaphorically that a woman who actually did act like that would in fact then be punished by being made to be barren herself.

There is an instance of that, isn't there? In David's wife, Michael, when she mocks him for dancing before the Lord and we're told she had no child, therefore she was punished in that way.

[31 : 36] He never went near her again. Could be that. But at any rate, what the point is is very clear. Fertility is to be cherished. It's not to be carelessly threatened in any way.

It's not to be damaged. It's to be defended even in your enemy because it's a very serious matter to God. Again, when you see that, I think you see just how very relevant that principle still is to our modern world.

There are some people, indeed, there are some national governments that effectively want to enforce sterility upon people. We all know about China's famous one-child policy, don't we? And indeed, all the sequelae of damaging side effects that there have been in that country because of that. Well, it's no surprise. It's against God's love of fertility and fecundity.

That's not to say, of course, that planned fertility is wrong, that using contraception wisely and responsibly is wrong. That's very, very different from deliberately planned infertility.

[32 : 43] But again, you see, careless damage to fertility is an epidemic in our society today through sexually transmitted diseases. So much casual sex among young adults has led to an explosion.

And that builds up a problem, a time bomb of infertility later on when people want to have children. Careless causing of infertility because of ignoring of God's commands.

And what about the latest, most awful business of surgical, deliberate genital mutilation and sterility of young people, even some young children because of this aggressive attitude of transgenderism that is so rampant in our society today?

Well, that is not just folly, friends. In God's eyes, that must be utter wickedness. It's a blatant suppression of the truth. Indeed, suppression of the truth is the word in this area.

Some of you may have read in last week's newspaper the article written by one of the world's foremost gender reconstruction surgeons who's doing these kind of operations all the time. And he was saying that he's being asked now more and more years later by people coming back and saying, please reverse this.

[33 : 55] It's actually made us so miserable. We want to go back to the way that we were before. And it's a very difficult thing. And he and others have been pushing for universities to do studies looking at regret in people who have gone through these things.

And you know what? They can't get any universities that are willing to do it. Why? Because they're so afraid of the politically correct establishment that we live in. So afraid of the lobbies and the thought police that so control our media and increasingly our governing authorities today.

Suppression of the truth. Well, I say again, a culture that utterly denies and scorns and damages these things that God holds so important will in the end know disaster.

There's no other possibility. Of course, it's not all negative. These passages also, I think, remind us of God's love for fertility and his protection of it.

And I think we can be thankful, therefore, today for the many assisted fertility techniques that we do have today that help people conceive that otherwise couldn't. Some Christians, I think, in an unwarranted way are opposed to anything that they deem is unnatural or artificial.

[35 : 14] Well, lever-right marriage is certainly rather unnatural and artificial. And in medicine, techniques are used in all sorts of ways, in all kinds of ways without question.

And we accept them. I think, therefore, it means that in this whole realm of reproductive technology, we needn't necessarily throw out everything. IVF, for example, artificial insemination by a husband. Some people would even want to think in the light of what we're dealing with here about the issue of lever-right marriage, even of donation. That's a more tricky issue. But there are also certain genetic

therapies and interactions that can help protect people's fertility today, help them to be enabled to give birth to a child that will be healthy.

I think as Christians, there are many things that we ought to be thankful for. But, and the thing is, we haven't got time today to go into all the necessary detail of these things, but I do need to add this in case you misunderstand me.

But, look again at verses 11 and 12. That very passage tells us, doesn't it, that the ends do not necessarily justify the means. Don't forget that.

[36 : 23] Preserving life is good. Protecting someone from harm, whether through a beating, or through some other disease is a good thing, but not if it damages other life, not if it violates something else that God has made sacred and has put under his protection.

So we mustn't forget that. So this whole realm of bioethics and reproductive technology, there are many caveats for Christians. There must be. About what is right and good, not just what's possible. And also what is wise and what is sensible. And of course also, what is our attitude and what is our appetite that is driving what we're seeking. Is it actually something out of selfish covetousness or is it selfless caring for what God cherishes and what God cares for?

But there's always a lot for us to think about. And you see, it's that attitude of heart, our true desire, that matters above all. And that's what's reinforced particularly in verses 13 to 16 here, which tell us that there must be no corruption in the realm of fairness, in the realm of honest dealings, but rather that God's people are to have truly clean hearts.

Not selfishly profiteering, but rather showing purity in all commerce, in all trade. Perhaps these verses would be good ones for Mr. Davis and Mr. Barney to read together before they start the next round of talks with the European Union.

[37 : 53] How about that? No false measures, no false weights in your pocket. But they certainly helpfully remind us, don't they, that it is not just sexual ethics that concern the Lord our God, but all of life.

And fairness and not crookedness in all our life and our work and our business life is just as important to God. And notice that the corruption in that era, dishonesty there, we're told here, is an abomination to God.

Very strong words used of sexual perversion, used of frank idolatry. And if you doubt that, if you think those things are not as important to God, well, read the prophet Amos, read the apostle James in his letter and you'll find you're quite wrong.

So if we in the church have to talk a lot today about sexual matters, and we do, don't we? Because our world is so obsessed by these things. We can't avoid it. But some Christians also need to think a lot more about these sort of verses and what these things are saying and challenging to our lives. James in his letter is very clear. It's the desire in the heart, isn't it, that grows into a devotion to that desire and a determination to achieve that desire.

[39 : 11] And that is what leads to the deeds of wrong and of sinfulness. And that's why here you see the command is not just not to use unjust measures but not even to possess them.

Because don't think that you won't in the end suppress the right and give birth to those sinful thoughts. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires, says the apostle Paul.

Give no opportunity the devil, not a toehold for his wickedness. And you see, friends, this area of coveting, of pursuing material gain is so very powerful.

That's why there are so many warnings all through the scriptures to Christian people, to Christian leaders. Paul says to Timothy, those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

Take it seriously. You think you're exempt to that? I'm not exempt to that. We need to guard our hearts, don't we, against covetousness from leading us into what God hates.

[40 : 26] For the cares and the love of money, material gain, says Paul, is the root of all kinds of evil. It's through this craving that some have wandered from the truth and pierced themselves with many pangs.

And the only salvation from that, says Paul, is godliness with contentment. The very opposite of covetousness.

Only that will guard your heart if you banish all thoughts of false accounting, all thoughts of false measures from your heart. Only that will stop them coming out in your actual practice. Godliness.

That means a real fear of the Lord, doesn't it? That will banish covetousness and bring contentment. Whatever you covet, whether it's a spouse you don't have, whether it's a house, a job, wealth, fame, whatever it is, all purity, all fairness in life flows only out of contentment in your heart. And that flows only out of reverence and fear for God and God alone. As we love Him, we will become more like Him. Become full of mercy. And care and love for others.

[41 : 41] Selflessness. But if we despise Him, then we will become merciless and callous and selfish towards others. Like Amalek.

That's the point of these last verses, 17 to 19, isn't it? Remember Amalek. Just like remember Miriam back in the last chapter. But here it's an even more severe warning. The Amalekites were merciless, verse 18.

They hated God's people. They were brutal and hateful. They preyed on the most weak, the most vulnerable to their gain. But at heart, you see verse 18, it was because they had no fear of God in their eyes.

Exodus chapter 17, verse 16, tells us they raised their hand, they raised their fist against the throne of God. They were full of contempt for the one true God.

And if you hate God, that will always lead to contempt and hatred of God's creatures, human beings made in His image. If you de-God God, you will inevitably dehumanize man and yourself.

[42 : 49] That's why C.S. Lewis calls the evil protagonist in one of his novels the un-man.

Remember Amalek, says Moses, don't be like him.

Derek Kibner rightly says that the whole wilderness journey is like a microcosm of the whole drama of God's judgment and salvation. And life and death is confronting every participant.

It's a time of destiny. It's a time of decision. And Amalek chose against God. There was no fear of God. He shook his fist at God. And his destiny, his name blotted out from under heaven forever.

Don't forget that, that's what God is saying. How we live matters. And it matters for eternity. My father used to quote the old saying, many of you will know it, sow a thought, reap an action.

Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. And sow a character and reap a destiny. Don't be deceived, says the Apostle Paul.

[43 : 57] For God is not mocked. A man sows what he reaps. If you sow to please the flesh, covetousness in your heart, from the flesh, you will reap corruption. That was Amalek.

But if you sow to the Spirit of God, he says, finding contentment in godliness, contentment in God alone, in Christ, then you will reap eternal life. As we sow, so shall we reap.

And C.S. Lewis makes another of his characters say this, good is always getting better and bad always getting worse. The possibilities for neutrality are always diminishing.

And in the end, of course, the Bible says there is no neutrality. Books will be opened, as John saw in his vision of glory. And for some, the terrifying, the terrible reality will be to find that their names are blotted out forever from that book of life.

For outside, outside are the dogs, the sexually immoral, the idolaters, and all those who love and practice falsehood through covetousness.

[45 : 10] That's the declaration of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. You see now why godliness and contentment is such gain, says Paul, because it's everlasting gain.

Therefore, says the Lord here in verse 19, even when God has given you rest from your enemies in your promised inheritance, in God's kingdom, never forget, never forget, remember Amalek and put away every possibility of falling in with him and his ways, far less following his heart and living like him, but rather that the great concern of verse 6 here always be yours, that your name never be blotted out of God's inheritance, or indeed the name of any of your Christian brothers and sisters. How much more, friends, must that be true for us upon whom the ends of the ages has come in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ? How much more in all material things must we as Christ's people be seen as generous advocates of his kingdom and not covetous?

And above all, to be guardians of one another's names being written forever in the Lamb's book of life. Listen to Paul.

Brothers and sisters, if anyone be caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness, keeping watch on yourself, lest you also be tempted.

[46 : 44] Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ, caring, not callous. And James, if any one of you wonders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and cover a

multitude of sins, caring for his name to be kept in God's kingdom forever and ever and not blotted out.

There's no greater reflection of the generous abundance of God's heart, is there, on this earth than a people in a church for whom that is their great goal?

So may it be ours together as his people. Let's pray to preserve our brother's name in Israel. Lord our God, grant us, we pray, lives that reflect yours, clean hearts, careful hands, caring homes, that we might be generous advocates of all your kindness in this world and above all of your greatest kindness of all in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And keep us, we pray, from stumbling and so present us blameless at last before his presence with great joy. For Jesus' sake, amen.

Amen. Amen.