

# Numbers Chapter 5 v 1 - Chapter 6 v 8

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 14 April 2019

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] Reading through to verse 15. The Lord said to Moses, Command the Israelites to send away from the camp anyone who has a defiling skin disease, or a discharge of any kind, or who is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body.

Send away male and female alike, send them outside the camp, so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell among you. Israelites did so, they sent them outside the camp, they did just as the Lord had instructed Moses.

The Lord said to Moses, Say to the Israelites, Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way, and so is unfaithful to the Lord, is guilty, and must confess the sin they have committed.

They must make full restitution for the wrong they have done, add a fifth of the value to it, and give it all to the person they have wronged. But if that person has no close relative to whom restitution can be made for the wrong, the restitution belongs to the Lord, must be given to the priest, along with the ram with which atonement is made for the wrongdoer.

All the sacred contributions the Israelites bring to a priest will belong to him. Sacred things belong to their owners, but what they give to the priest will belong to the priest. Then the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the Israelites and say to them, If a man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, so that another man has sexual relations with her, and this is hidden from her husband, and her impurity is undetected, since there is no witness against her, and she has not been caught in the act.

[ 1 : 37 ] And if feelings of jealousy come over her husband, and he suspects his wife and she is impure, or, if he is jealous and suspects her even though she is not impure, then he is to take his wife to the priest.

Stop there. We'll turn over the page and go to verse 27 and 28. I won't tell you all that goes on. It will come out when we look at this passage later. Verse 27, If she's made herself impure and been unfaithful to her husband, this will be the result, when she's made to drink the water that brings a curse and causes bitter suffering.

It will enter her, her abdomen will swell, and her womb will miscarry, and she will become a curse. If, however, the woman has not made herself impure, but is clean, she will be cleared of guilt and be able to have children.

Chapter 6, verse 1, The Lord said to Moses, speak to the Israelites, and say to them, If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of dedication to the Lord as a Nazarite, they must abstain from wine and other fermented drink, must not drink vinegar made from wine or other fermented drink, they must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins.

As long as they remain under their Nazarite vow, they must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins. During the entire period of their Nazarite vow, no razor may be used on their head, they must be holy until the period of their dedication to the Lord is over.

[ 3 : 09 ] They must let their hair grow long. Then over, finally, to verse 21, verse 21 of chapter 6, This is the law of the Nazarite, who vows offerings to the Lord in accordance with their dedication.

In addition to whatever else they can afford, they must fulfill the vows they have made according to the law of the Nazarite. From Numbers 5 and 6, and I'd like you to have your Bibles open there.

So far in Numbers, we've seen how the Lord has called for the counting of the tribes and recorded that number. And then we were told about the arrangement of the camp with the tabernacle in the middle, with the tribes around, the Levites first of all encircled around, then the rest of the tribes circled around, then we were told about the counting of the Levites and the responsibilities of the Levites and their different particular ministries and groups and the chief priests and so on.

And then we come to chapter 5 and 6, and it's a real change, isn't it? A real change from all the numbers and the counting and the organizing and the preparation. Suddenly, God gives commands

of a different sort.

Practical commands, but different commands. I don't know when John and Anne went to Buckingham Palace, not to get his OBE or MBE, as I said last week, that's next year.

[ 4 : 48 ] But if you saw a flag, did you see the Queen's flag flying, which meant that she was in residence? Not the Union Jack, it's her own special flag. Wherever she is, this flag flies, whether it's Balmoral or Buckingham or the other places that she owns as well, Sandringham and so on.

It's her royal standard. It says the Queen is in residence here. There's an old chorus, some of you might remember, that has these words, love is a flag flown high from the castle of my heart. How many people know that one? Yes, okay. For the King is in residence here. I'm not going to sing it. I'm not going to get anybody else to sing it. Love is a flag flown high from the castle of my heart. Certainly one of the chief characteristics that Christ is in residence in our lives is of course that we will have love. Love for Christ and love for others.

That's the evidence, the fruit, the proof that we've been born again of the Holy Spirit. And of course what is true of the individual believer must also be true of the body of believers, the local church, the disciples of Christ.

[ 6 : 03 ] Jesus in his upper room discourse as he talked with his disciples in John 13 reminds them of this truth. By this everyone will know that you're my disciples if you love one another.

It's one of the great challenges for us as Christians. Does my life and does our church, as it were, have that banner over it of love? Do our actions, our words, our thoughts, our dealings, are they motivated from love?

But, love is not the only visible sign of Christ being present in the life of a believer and present in the life of his church.

Other characteristics of his nature, of his character, will be revealed. And one of them particularly, we've touched on it before in other places, is his holiness.

His holiness. And that's what we have here, I believe, in Numbers 5 and 6. God has been dealing with the people, as I said, in their numbers, in organizing, preparing them for the journey through the wilderness as they were on their way to the promised land, to Canaan.

[ 7 : 12 ] And now God gets down to the nitty-gritty and he calls them to holiness. These instructions that he gives are all about and in response to the fact that God is dwelling amongst them.

Do you see that in verse 3? Send away male and female alike, send them outside the camp, so that they may not defile their camp where I dwell among them.

God is a holy God, as we've been singing and thinking about. And he demands holiness of those who are in contact with him. That's why it's impossible.

Unless our sins have been forgiven, unless we've been cleansed, unless we are righteous in God's sight, then we cannot enter into friendship or relationship with God and we certainly can't go to heaven.

And the reality is that none of us are righteous in ourselves. None of us are sinless. None of us can deal with or remove our sin. It must be the work of Christ.

[ 8 : 14 ] It must be the work of God. And so God is living amongst his people and he requires of them holiness. Most of you will know that the word holy really has its root and its meaning in the word to separate, to cut, to part.

and this is particularly the case when it comes to God. So when you read through the Old Testament, you'll find that there are buildings that are holy, the tabernacle, then of course the temple.

There are objects that are holy, the implements that are used in the sacrifices. There are people who are holy, the priests, and so on. And then of course when we come into the New Testament, we find that we, God's people, are a holy people, Peter tells us.

We are people separated for God, holy for God. And there are two aspects, two sides of the coin, to holiness. holiness.

Particularly holiness when it comes to the people of God. These both come out and that's why we're doing chapters 5 and 6. Because in one sense there's a negative aspect of holiness and there's a positive aspect of holiness.

[ 9 : 29 ] The negative aspect is separation from everything that's displeasing in God's sight. To be holy is to be separate from the unclean things.

That's what the Bible, New Testament, talks a lot about being unclean, being unholy, being that which is sinful and so on. And then there is the positive aspect which is separation to the Lord, being holy to the Lord, devoted to Him, given over to Him.

So a separation and a giving over to, a dedicating to, which of course we particularly see in chapter 6. And these principles of relationship with God holiness, sanctification, of being separate to the Lord are not simply just Old Testament things that we can forget about in our lives today.

They are principles that go all the way through Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. They are truths which stand the test of time. God is still as holy as He has always been.

He hasn't dropped His standards. We may find in the world we live that the standards of our world have dropped and even perhaps our own standards as we've been affected by the attitudes of the world around about us.

[10:48] God does not change. He is perfectly, completely holy. And although these regulations that we have here apply only to the Old Testament people of God, the principles pass through to us through Christ.

Christ has dealt with the law. He has come to fulfill it on our behalf. He's come to make us righteous before God. But that does not mean that the principles of what God calls for in our lives have changed.

And so, as I've already mentioned, Peter, as he writes the believers in his first letter, he says to them, verses 15 and 16 of chapter 1, Just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

For it is written, Be holy because I am holy. A quote from Leviticus and chapter 11. So, how are we to be holy, men and women?

How are we to be those who live lives of holiness? Well, chapter 5 is the negative, as I put it, the separation. And we can see that particularly, first of all, that those believers were to separate themselves from infectious diseases.

[12:10] Verse 2, anyone who's got a defiling skin disease or a discharge of any kind or is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body. In other words, they touched a dead body or been near a dead body.

These are the things that meant that the people had to be separated from the camp. First of all, those infectious diseases.

There's a defiling skin disease. Older translations will have leprosy, but it doesn't just mean that. It means any sort of skin irritation or sore or rash.

Then a discharge, some sort of weeping, not crying, you know, pussing and other unpleasant things that happen from time to time and finally uncleanness because of contact with a dead person.

Now these commands were not just because of hygiene, though of course it makes sense and we've learnt in the last hundred years or so that diseases and illnesses are transmitted by touch, by proximity, either by breathing upon somebody or by touching somebody, but these are not here purely for that reason.

[13:20] These have very spiritual truths to teach us. Every illness, every disease in the world is due to the fact that this is a fallen and sinful world.

This is not the world God created. God created a perfect world, a holy world, a good world. But when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, what we call the fall, when they fell away from God's standards, they fell into sin.

So we're told in the Bible that as it were, the gates were open, Pandora's box was open and sin came rushing into the world and affected every part of God's creation, us and all of nature as well.

So when we see these things here in the Old Testament, they point us to the spiritual problem. They point us to the problem of sin in the life of the believer and in the life of the church.

So what does this mean? Does it mean that nobody is able to come into church unless they've passed a medical? No, it doesn't mean that. If you've got a cough or a cold, then you're not allowed to cross the door.

[14:35] If you've got a rash, then that means you've got to stay outside. No, of course, it doesn't mean any of those things. What it does mean is that we are to separate ourselves from those things which, as it were, defile us, make us unclean, that lead us to sin, that tempt us away from God.

Again, in 1 Peter, this time in chapter 2, at the very start of his chapter, verse 1, he says this, therefore, get rid of or rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

And that's a command that's repeated throughout the New Testament epistles again and again. The church is told, the believers are told to get rid of those things which are infectious spiritually, those things that are unclean spiritually, those wrong attitudes, those wrong motivations, those wrong ways of living your life.

We put up with them sometimes, don't we? We put up with a rash that we might have on our arm. We say, well, I'm not going to go to the doctor about something as trivial as that.

It doesn't really matter. And of course, then it gets a bit bigger, doesn't it? And it starts to spread and it starts to become very irritating. And you say, well, I don't know, I'm just going to buy some cream from the chemist or something.

[16:00] I'm just going to wash it more. And then, of course, before long, it gets bigger until eventually we have to go and get it dealt with by the doctor. And he tells us, why didn't you come sooner?

Why didn't you come when it first started? It would be so much easier to treat. But that's what sin is like in the human heart, isn't it? In your heart and mine. Sin might start quite small.

It might just start off with a little bit of envy. A bit envious of somebody else in the church for their job or their relationship or for their finances or for their situation.

And that little bit of envy, you think, well, it's not wrong to be a little bit envious or jealous of them. It's just natural for me to feel this way. I'm having a rough time of life. But we soon find that that envy and jealousy begins to grow.

And so we begin to feel certain malice towards that other person who's got a better situation than ours. Not just envy, but we start to despise them because, well, it's not fair.

[17:00] And then we start to get angry. And it grows and grows and grows until eventually something is said or something is done until we realize that this is a big problem in my life.

It's become consuming. The Bible tells us very clearly that we're to deal with sin at its root. Don't let a root of bitterness, says Paul, grow in your heart.

Make sure that where there's unforgiveness that you forgive. Make sure that jealousy and envy doesn't have a root. That means we've got to examine ourselves regularly before the Lord.

Doctors and specialists often tell us to do that for signs of cancer, all sorts of things. Say, well, examine yourself. Make sure when you have a shower or whatever it is, just check. How often are we doing spiritual check-ups in our hearts before the Lord?

Is there something unclean in your heart and mine? It may seem to be small, insignificant, but dear friends, unless we take it to the Lord, unless we confess it, unless we ask for his cleansing of it, unless we ask for his help to deal with it, it will grow, it will spread, and it will destroy.

[18:18] And we know that, don't we, dear friends? We've seen that in the lives of many others. Perhaps we've seen it in our own lives at times, get to a point where it's almost consumed us. Holiness to the Lord.

And then we see, not only we see infectious diseases, but we see unloving deeds, don't we? Verse 5 and following. The Lord says to Moses, say to the Israelites, any man or woman who wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord.

Isn't that interesting? If we wrong somebody else, we're being unfaithful to the Lord. We're sinning against him. This is one of the things that many people find very hard to grasp, isn't it?

That when we sin, whatever sin that may be, however we act towards others, ultimately, we're sinning against God. And so a person will say, well, you know, I've never done anything to God.

I've never said anything against God. No, but you've been unfaithful or you've been unkind or you've been angry or you've been hateful. Well, all those things are sin against God.

[19:22] Let's never forget that. That's why Christ had to come. That's why Christ had to offer himself as atonement for our sins to God. And as we see here, there was an atonement to be made through a ram.

So here's the situation. Somebody is acting in a wrong way. We're not told what it is. It would seem to be perhaps some thieving, taking of something that didn't belong to that person because they're called upon to make restitution, to pay back what they've taken plus a little bit extra, a fifth.

They're told they've got to put things right. They've got to confess their sin. They've got to make restitution and they've got to offer a sacrifice are all part of them receiving forgiveness from God.

Forgiveness isn't something that we just take for granted. Oh, well, you know, we may think badly of those who feel they need to confess their sins to a priest and rightly so.

A priest can't forgive us. He can't make us right with God. But confession is important to God. And it's still the same today.

[ 20 : 38 ] You see, we do wrong one another as Christians. We may not wrong one another intentionally. It may just be perhaps, as we said before, there's something there, a little bit of an irritant in our hearts.

And so when that person crosses us in some way, we bite their heads off. We can steal from one another honor and respect and love and care and faithfulness.

Not just practical financial things. We need to confess our sin. That's why we need to keep short accounts. That's why we need to ask God to search us as the psalmist did.

Search me and look within me if there's anything wrong within my heart, Lord. We need to confess it to him with the assurance that he hears. Our sin is against the Lord.

We need to make restitution. If you've bitten somebody's head off, if you've said something rude to them, if you've lost your temper with them, then go and say sorry. Don't we find that hard?

[ 21 : 38 ] Sorry is the hardest word to say. I'm sorry that I jumped down your throat. I'm sorry that I was insensitive. I'm sorry. It's humbling yourself.

But we've got to do it. We must, dear friends, apologize. If we have done something wrong, then we need to make restitution if we can. If we have taken something we shouldn't have taken, we need to give it back and make restitution.

If we've said something to somebody in public or about something about somebody in public, we need to publicly apologize as well and say I was wrong to say that about so and so or wrong to gossip about them or wrong to judge them.

don't let anything get in the way of putting things right with your brother and sister in Christ and particularly with the Lord. But then of course we need to rejoice in the sacrifice for sin that God has provided for us in Jesus.

One of the hardest things can be to forgive ourselves. We feel so bad the enemy comes to condemn us and says, you know, you're dreadful. What an awful person you are. You can never be a Christian.

[ 22 : 49 ] God can never love you. No, thank God there is forgiveness in the lamb, the Lord Jesus. This man or woman who sinned had to bring a ram to make atonement. Thank God Jesus, our atonement lamb, our Passover lamb has been slain for us and we have forgiveness with him.

Come to God and thank him. Lord, thank you that sinner though I am, you forgive me. Dear friends, we mustn't let the devil have room in our church, in our lives because his work is, as we thought this morning, only to destroy, to divide and to darken.

So that's the first two. Then we come to this third one which is the longest one by far. So we've looked at infectious diseases, unloving deeds and now we have immoral displays.

And I didn't read all of it because it's very long but really it's to do with the matter of adultery and marriage. Basically if a man suspected his wife of being unfaithful or he believed that she had been then they were both to go before the priest and the priest was to give this woman some water to drink which had, in one sense, was cursed.

So that if she actually had sinned and was hiding it, then ultimately there would be consequences for her. She would become barren. But if it was just that the man was jealous-minded and was seeking for an excuse just to get her out of the way, then ultimately the Lord would vindicate her and she would be able to have children.

[ 24 : 33 ] That was something of it. It was a protection against wives as often we find in the New Testament and the Old Testament. Women were treated poorly and harshly and though this may seem to be a harsh thing in itself, it was actually protection so that no wife could be wrongly accused of adultery because of course to be caught in adultery was a very serious, serious matter.

So why, after these matters of disease, these matters of wrongdoing, do we have this here about, in one sense, the safeguarding of faithfulness in marriage?

Well, simply for this reason, dear friends, marriage has always been throughout history the very foundation of any society. Marriage, the union of a man and a woman, has been the bedrock for family, for community, for all things.

And when marriage is attacked or destroyed or undermined, then inevitably the whole of the community suffers. And we are seeing that in our own land, we know it is true, we know it is the case.

From the moment that unfaithfulness was allowed and adultery was just seen as nothing important to the situation we have now where marriage is completely denied as God has given it, then we find our society falling apart.

[ 25 : 56 ] so it's vitally important. It's not something insignificant. To be faithful to your wife, to be faithful to your husband is absolutely paramount for the believer.

And again, how sadly we've seen in our own lives, friends, Christians, believers, whose marriages have been broken and they themselves have been utterly destroyed and their family too by unfaithfulness.

God calls them to bring it into the public, I as it were, so they can deal with it, not to hide behind it, not so he can just, as it were, get rid of it in quiet and the whole process is meant to show that God sees the heart.

He sees whether there's guilt or whether there's innocence. Now we are surrounded, aren't we, by sexual immorality, but that's nothing new. Read 1 Corinthians and you'll find that the Corinthian believers were homosexual, they were adulterers, they were impure, they were all sorts of things, all the things that we still have in our world today.

Those sins have always been present, many of them have been hidden, but now they're much more to the surface. As the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore the bride of Christ, in our lives we are to be faithful, faithful to the promises we've made before God, faithful to one another.

[ 27 : 30 ] The writer to Hebrews in chapter 13 says, marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure. Dear friends, let me urge you and encourage you to pray for married couples, pray for husbands with so much pornography thrust upon them wherever they turn, wherever they look on TV, newspapers, billboards, in the streets.

Pray for godly Christian men to be faithful, to withstand these things. Pray for wives not to become impatient with their husbands because they're not as romantic as they used to be.

Pray for couples, dear friends, that they might not be tempted to dishonour their marriage vows, but to find their satisfaction and their joy in one another.

Pray for one another in this matter. So we've looked at chapter 5, and as I said before, chapter 5 is in one sense the negative. It's a separating away from evil.

It's a removing ourselves from those things which are harmful spiritually, unclean, and displeasing to God. And very briefly I want us just to pick up chapter 6. Because chapter 6 is the flip side of that.

[ 28 : 49 ] In one sense chapter 5 is don't do, chapter 6 is do do. This is where we see the positive aspect of holiness, particularly in these people who were to take the Nazarite vow.

In other words, they were people who wanted to dedicate themselves to the Lord in a very public and real and living way. And they had to do certain things, they had to keep away from certain things that would be harmful to them, or things that would show that they were the Lord's, they weren't to drink, they're any grape-related products, they weren't to trim their hair and cut their hair, and they were to keep away from everything unclean.

Samson, of course, when we get into the book of Judges, was a Nazarite, dedicated to God from birth, so was John the Baptist, the same. And it wouldn't surprise you that this phrase, Nazarite, this title, again, finds its root meaning in the word to separate.

But it's a separating to the Lord, it's a giving of yourself, a dedicating of yourself to God, to live for him, and to be utterly sold out for him, we might say.

So how does this positive separation of the Nazarite apply to us today? Well, clearly we know there are some Christians who do, as it were, we might say dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord's service, they go into the mission field, or they're involved in some particular way, where they put aside a career which they may have had so that they might serve God.

[ 30 : 26 ] It may be short term, these Nazarites were meant to be short term, it's meant to be something that you did just for a year or so, or for several months or so. It was just a way of maybe realigning the compass of your spirit back to the Lord.

But the reality is this, dear friends, as Christians, our lives are to be lives of separation to the Lord, all the time, not just for a moment, not just for a time, not just for a season, and again we need to get some of these things right.

those who do or are called to the Lord's service full time, whether they be pastors or ministers or missionaries or so on, they are not more holy than everybody else.

