

Practical Love
Exodus 22:16-31
6/30/2013

It could be the biggest mistake that our culture makes. In our age of tolerance, a great divorce has been crowned king of all the smaller divorces that happen all the time. The great divorce is ripping apart love for God from love for other people. Tolerance is the code word for this divorce. Tolerance is used by the media especially to mean loving other people, while quite literally getting away with murder when it comes to God. Hatred of God and love towards people are two states of mind that most people think are totally compatible. You just watch the next time someone on television blabs about tolerating people of other viewpoints. You will notice that all of that tolerance and love will never extend to the Christian, because the love of God is not at the root of all their hot air about loving neighbors. The problem is that you can't truly love your neighbor unless you love God first. And of course, you can't love God unless He has loved you first.

We come to a series of laws that seem to have little to no connection one to another. We would make a big mistake if we thought that. They actually follow a very logical order that helps us to understand how the love of God relates to the love of one another. The first part of chapter 22 is all about property laws and restitution. Verses 16-17 serve as a sort of hinge between the two main parts of the chapter. We are not saying that a man's daughter is to be regarded as just some other kind of property. A man's daughter is a person. However, the issue of property has to do with how that daughter will be provided for. The bride-price was given to the father to be a kind of pledge or guarantee that the young man marrying his daughter would provide for her. In the case of the young man's untimely death, the bride-price would help provide for the daughter, who would go back to her father's house. The money was really intended for the well-being of the daughter. It did not belong to the father as money to do with as he wanted. It was a question of provision. This money was a property issue, and therefore, the connection with the previous passage concerning property becomes evident. However, since these verses also deal with a very personal issue, they also belong to what follows, which does deal with inter-personal issues.

The precise question at issue here is sex before marriage. A man seduces a woman who is not betrothed. This is not rape, but seduction. The laws for rape are much more strict, and they can be found in Deuteronomy 22. In this case, the young woman was a consenting party to the seduction. They both lose something in the seduction. She loses her virginity, which is not a small thing, contrary to how most people see it today. You cannot put a price on being able to go into marriage without fornication on your conscience. To today's young women, you need to put a much higher value on your virginity than our culture would. Today, the message seems to be that a used car is better than a new car that has never been driven before. In this case, that is most certainly not true. Protect your virginity! That goes for young men, too.

Not only would the woman lose something priceless, but the man would lose something, as well. He would have to make sure that the young woman was provided for, even if he wound up not being married to her. He was required to pay that bride-price, whether the father allowed him to marry her or not. The language of verse 17 "utterly refuses" suggests that the normal practice would be for the father to allow the two of them to get married, usually in order to preserve the girl's reputation. However, in some cases, the

marriage would not be suitable at all. If the young man was not part of the people of God, for instance, it would not be right to add another sin on top of the first one. Many people used to think quite differently. Just a few short decades ago, people used to think that if two people had sex before marriage, they were required to marry. Shotgun weddings, they are called. It seems clear here, and in Paul's letters, however, that if one of the young people is not a Christian, there should be no marriage. Protect your virginity and protect your faith! Christ did the same, spiritually speaking. He kept Himself for His church, and was not enticed by Satan's temptations to bow down and worship Satan, which would have been spiritual fornication or adultery. Christ betrothed Himself to His church, and kept Himself pure for her. We ought to do the same, not only with our physical marriages, but also with our spiritual marriage to Christ.

The rest of the passage moves into the realm of inter-personal behavior. And right away, we see the connection of love of God and love of one another. Verses 18-20 seem like random laws. They are not. They deal with pagan worship practices. There is some debate about verse 18. Some people think it should be translated the way it is in the NKJV, talking about a sorceress. Others translate the word as "seductress." Whichever word is used here, it is plain that the woman in question is enchanting someone or something. This kind of thing was not to happen among the people of God. By the way, this verse was used to justify the Salem witch trials in the 1690's. It does not justify those proceedings, because this verse is addressed to the people of God, not to a secular government. Therefore, if someone were claiming to be a witch in the church, that person should be put out of the church. The kind of sorcery here in view is a kind of attempt to control spiritual forces. Only God can do that. We must, therefore, leave the spiritual forces to the control of God. Our weapon in that realm is prayer, not conjuring.

A further application comes to us in the realm of the new fascination with magic and the occult that is spreading like gangrene in today's society. Now here we need to be discerning. Anything that would encourage people to practice magic and sorcery should be discouraged. That is not how God created this world. He alone controls it. It is a different matter, however, if an author manufactures an imaginary world that is not our world at all, and makes the rules different. This is how I would describe the difference, for instance, between Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia and Tolkien's Middle Earth, on the one hand, with Rowling's Harry Potter books on the other. Lewis and Tolkien made up a different world from ours. And their intent was to help us see our own world with new and different eyes. The farthest thing from their heads would have been to encourage people to practice magic. In fact, they were trying to teach the Christian faith through those books. Harry Potter, on the other hand, takes place in our world. J.K. Rowling, the author of the books, has been known to encourage people to study and practice magic. Furthermore, the ethics of Harry Potter leave a lot to be desired, in terms of the end justifying the means, which it certainly does not. Now, many fine upstanding Christians disagree with me here, and think that the Harry Potter books are okay. It is a debate in Christian circles. But do not assume that because someone says it is okay, that therefore it is. We need to exercise discernment with regard to these things, and ask the question whether it is helping our Christian walk, or whether it is driving us away from God.

Verse 19 again has to do with pagan worship, as having sex with an animal was thought to increase the fertility of the land. However, as we know, there was no suitable animal found which could be a partner for the man in the garden. Instead, the species are all quite distinct, contrary to evolutionary claims. Animals are not made in the image of God like

humanity is. Therefore, that kind of cross-species relationship is an abomination. Verse 20 is easy to understand as a reiteration of the first and second commandments. Worship the right God, and worship Him in the right way.

Having a right relationship with God is essential to understanding what follows. The order of these laws follows the ten commandments. After the hinge verses (16 and 17), we have three laws about how to love God, followed by laws on how to love our neighbor.

We learn from verses 21-31 what loving our neighbor should look like. Firstly we learn that we should not mistreat other people who look and act differently from us. We ourselves are aliens and strangers in this world. We are just passing through. To most people, we are the nerds! We are the weird people! We need to remember that, because sometimes we become a little too comfortable with people who look like us, and a little too uncomfortable around people who are different. But we are not to show favoritism. If someone comes into our worship service, not wearing what we think is proper, or who says "Amen" at the end of every full sentence, or who sings terribly off-key, we should not treat that person as the dirt of the street. We need to show love and compassion. Do not forget that our Lord Jesus Christ was not handsome, as Isaiah makes very plain. He was not glamorous. He didn't sit with the fine upstanding people. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. In fact, if we become snooty, we move into the very dangerous area of being like the Pharisees, who looked down their long noses at Jesus and His disciples, because they just weren't social climbers. They were not the baby-boomers. They were not hip and chic. In saying this, we need to be careful that we don't go too far the opposite direction, and condemn anyone who has fine clothes, and looks neat and clean. The point is no favoritism.

Verses 25-27 have to do with lending money. What is interesting about this passage is that it encourages us to do more giving than lending. Have you ever wondered why it is that a garment taken in pledge needs to be given back to the borrower at the end of the day? That doesn't sound like a very sound collateral to take! The idea here is that the lender needs to lend without the assumption that he is going to be paid back. Now, if we borrow something, we need to make sure to pay it back, as the first part of the chapter makes absolutely clear. However, if we are the ones doing the lending, then we need to consider it essentially as a gift. We should not charge interest on a loan to our fellow believers.

The last part of the chapter returns again to how we love and honor God. Verse 28 is a restatement of the third commandment not to take the name of the Lord in vain. Verses 29-30 are intended to show us that everything we own actually belongs to God. Here is a good place to start with the question of the tithe to God. Everything we have belongs to God, and comes from Him. Giving the first part of that back to God is our way of showing how dependent and thankful we are to God for what He has provided. Tithing is something that continues into the New Testament. For even when Jesus tears down the Pharisees for being too particular about their tithes, he still tells them that they should do that, without neglecting the weightier aspects of the law.

Finally, the law regarding ancient roadkill was that it was not fit for human consumption, presumably because it would be impossible to remove the blood from it, and the ancient Israelites were not allowed to eat meat with the blood still in it.

Our passage tells us about ways that we are to love God, because He first loved us. We should therefore love Him with all that we are and have. And we should love our neighbor as ourselves. Truly, on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Grace and love come before obedience, and lead to obedience. Love of God and love of neighbor

are intertwined and inseparable. Let us follow our Lord God in this, as in everything else He tells us.