



Deuteronomy 23:9-18
The Holiness of God

9 " When the army goes out against your enemies, then keep yourself from every wicked thing.

10 "If there is any man among you who becomes unclean by some occurrence in the night, then he shall go outside the camp; he shall not come inside the camp.

11 "But it shall be, when evening comes, that he shall wash with water; and when the sun sets, he may come into the camp.

12 "Also you shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out;

13 "and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse.

14 "For the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.

15 " You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you.

16 "He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.

17 " There shall be no ritual harlot of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel.

18 "You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God.

God commanded that when soldiers were on campaign, then rather than just going to the bathroom inside the camp they go outside the camp to a fixed “place outside the camp” or what we would call a latrine area, where they could go to the bathroom. They were also explicitly told to dig a whole and then cover it up when they had finished doing their business.

There are countless countries, even today, where these simple hygienic laws would have a marked positive effect on the general health of their populations. This is similar to the way that if we actually followed the Lord’s guidelines in regard to sexual activity, STDs would be virtually eliminated. We see that principle again and again in that matter of obedience to God’s laws. The most important benefits we gather in obeying God’s commandments are spiritual, but there are temporal benefits as well. If I honor my parents, I don’t get spanked, if I’m zealous to safeguard the purity of my marriage, the whole family is happier. If soldiers obey these instructions they would be far less likely to have their armies wiped out by Typhoid or Chlorea or any of the myriad of diseases spread by human excrement. If we obey God, our lives are better. Go figure

But in this case the reason for this strict camp sanitation is not merely health, in fact it was not even primary. The reason given by the Lord is that He himself goes up with the armies of Israel in their midst and therefore as Christopher Wright points out “**cleanliness is next to godliness is more**

biblical than some may have imagined” Cleanliness is certainly a symbol of holiness. They were to be a HOLY army amongst whom there was no uncleanness. The purity of the camp would also remind the soldiers that the Lord was in their midst and that they were not just fighting for themselves against a foreign nation. But despite the fact that they were soldiers they were a holy people, called to be *Qodosh*. This was extremely important, because armies are not generally known for holy living. Often the practice, ancient and modern, was to wink at the low moral standards of soldiers and sailors, but there was to be no such excuse for the people of God. At home or on campaign they were to be Holy to the Lord, and not to even begin to be involved in impurity lest it get progressively worse. As Calvin points out: **“If they had been permitted to defile every part of the camp, the people would presently have been hardened against filthiness of every sort. Thus they were held back by this rein, that they might more earnestly apply their minds to spiritual integrity.”**

The civil law in verses 15 & 16 regarding not returning runaway slaves goes directly counter to the laws of almost every other middle eastern country of the time. In fact, the code of Hammurabi explicitly states that someone who harbored a runaway slave was subject to the death penalty. Not returning a slave was considered the same as theft in the nations outside Israel, you were stealing someone else's property.

Therefore most of these nations had either explicit treaties or agreements to return these runaway slaves. Israel however, is forbidden to enter into these treaties with foreign nations. To send a slave back would have been to return him to the spiritual darkness that he had once dwelt in. The Israelites would remember that they too had once been slaves, and had dwelt in a land of darkness and oppression. The Lord had graciously set them free, and for them to have returned someone else to the same condition they had been set free from by God was manifestly unjust.

In fact the Lord commanded that they were not to be mistreated in any way, they could in fact settle wherever they wanted in the promised land. Again and again the Lord emphasized in his word, something that the other nations denied, namely that someone who had been a slave was equal in the eyes of the Lord with the other peoples and had been equally created by Him and in His image, therefore they had an equal right to salvation, and were not to be mistreated or sinned against because of their circumstances:

Job reinforces that point in *Job 31:13-15* ***“If I have despised the cause of my male or female servant When they complained against me, What then shall I do when God rises up? When He punishes, how shall I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?”***

In verses 17-18 the practice of cult prostitution, both male and female is specifically banned, and it is also forbidden to take money earned in this practice and pay it into the Lord's treasury as the payment for a vow.

Incidentally the use of the term Dog in verse 18 as in “price of a dog” may be confusing, the word *kevel* there does not refer to an actual dog, It is a condemnatory term for a male temple prostitute whose behavior was no better than that of a dog, which was an unclean animal. If you think that was a mean old testament kind of way of speaking about someone, please understand that the allegory is repeated in *Revelation 22:15* ***But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.*** Certain behaviors are unclean and nothing but

bestial in their nature, and when we take part in them we are acting no better than brute beasts rather than God's children created in his image.

The belief of the Canaanites was that the use of these temple prostitutes by men at their sacred shrines, would guarantee the fertility of their land and animals. Although to this day, I don't how that worked out with male temple prostitutes. The money that was given to these shrine prostitutes was paid into the temple sanctuary and used for its upkeep. This was never to be the case in the Temple, the Lord did not want "Dirty Money"

While it was specifically condemned as an abomination by God, Israel succumbed to this practice again and again in her history. We read that Jehoshaphat banished them from the land in 1 Kings 22:46 and that by the time of the writing of Hosea the practice had become common amongst the sons and daughters of Israel.

Incidentally while we may say, well I'm glad that doesn't go on today. Think again. Hinduism requires the use of temple prostitutes and countless female children are still being sold into this horrific pagan practice. If you are familiar with the story of the missionary Amy Carmichael, the majority of the girls who came to live and go to school at her mission were rescued from this hideous lifestyle.

Application:

Soldiers – Their application is obvious, Soldiers, Clean up after yourselves in camp. NO, the application is actually to live holy lives.

As Calvin remarks *"We know how greatly laws are disregarded during war, when all things are under the control of violence rather than reason; and we know that much license is wont to be given to soldiers, which would be by no means tolerated in peace. God would remedy this evil by requiring the Israelites to aim at the same purity in war as in peace; for this is a special law which forbids their being dissolute and unruly in war-time, as He has before condemned all impurity in general, as if He had said, that under no pretext would they be excusable, if they neglect the duty of cultivating habits of purity. For He does not command them to be cautious in the army and in the camp, as if they might sin with impunity when at home, but admonishes them that God would by no means excuse them although they should allege the necessity of war."*

Brothers, where do you need the assistance of the Lord the most? At home or in the field? *"The sum is, that when they have need of God's assistance, and are engaged in war against their enemies, the pursuit of holiness must not be omitted or neglected even in the midst of arms"* – Calvin

"Note, Proselytes and converts to the truth should be treated with particular tenderness, that they may have no temptation to return." – Henry

Offerings: *"That we cannot honour God with our substance unless it be honestly and honourably come by. It must not only be considered what we give, but how we got it; God hates robbery for burnt-offerings, and uncleanness too."* Money gotten by fraud or gambling or robbery is not a suitable tithe.

The practice of continually engaging in sin and then going out and “paying” guilt money to the Lord. Far too often, people have thought that by giving a donation to the Lord’s house their sins would be covered over.

Our own sanctification: We are a holy people redeemed of the Lord, we are neither to return to the lands or the practices that we have been delivered out of by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

God’s end in redeeming us was to create a Holy People:

Isa. 62:11 Indeed the LORD has proclaimed To the end of the world: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him.' "

12 And they shall call them The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; And you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.

1 Peter 1:13-16 “13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."