

Dealing with Sin in the Camp Numbers 5:1-31

Slide 1

Sin is a problem. In fact, it's a BIG problem in our day and age, but most of us don't even know it!

Sin diminishes potential, it destroys lives, it causes pain and sickness, it breaks up relationships, and decimates marriages, it wrecks societies, and worst of all it jeopardizes our eternal destiny.

Sin is everywhere, but in our day and age it's nowhere. That's because, no one wants to admit that what they're doing is a 'sin.'

It's amazing, even though the horrible results of sin are everywhere, nobody wants to believe it's because of sin! It's like littering. Have you ever run across anyone who admits to being a litterbug?

No one wants to admit they're the culprits, but if you drive down any highway, you'll see the results! The same is true of our society.

We see its murders, its missing children, its cheating and its corporate greed, but nobody wants to take responsibility.

I'm finding that fewer and fewer people want to use the word 'sin' in their vocabulary. It's like it's 'sinful' to talk about sin!

Even worse, if you have the audacity to mention that they might actually be committing a 'sin,' you're accused of being narrow minded, judgmental, and insensitive.

In some people's mind 'sins' are just a figment of our imagination. There aren't any standards of right and wrong, and so they just do what they feel is okay.

In other words, it's more important that we 'believe' we're a good person, whether we really are or not. For example:

- Nobody commits "adultery" anymore, they have "affairs." Having an affair sounds more acceptable.
- There are no more "blatant lies." Now we tell "white" lies, or as Oliver North told a congressional committee, *"I was provided with additional input that was radically different from the truth. I assisted in furthering that version."*
- We don't cheat people; we're getting justice for how they've treated us.
- Homosexuality isn't a sin, it's an alternative lifestyle.
- Killing unborn children has become "pro-choice."

We've redefined, refined, and dumbed down sin so much that nobody commits it anymore!

Now here's the problem, and I want you to listen carefully here. If there's no sin, then we're no longer sinners, and if we're no longer sinners we don't need salvation, we need "recovery."

And here's the real tragedy. If we don't think we need salvation, we'll never ask for it and if we never ask for it, we'll never receive it!

Which means we have millions of people today on the destructive path towards hell, that don't even know it!

That's why God said in 1 John 1:8-10, *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us."*

Sin is when I voluntarily separate myself from God, by deciding *"From now on, I make the rules, not Him!"*

I decide what's right and what's wrong and live my life according to my own rules. In doing that, I become my own God.

Self replaces God. Sin is an "I" problem." In fact, if you look, "i" is the middle letter in the word 'sin'!

Now the funny thing is, the bible assumes we know what sin is. It talks about it all the time, but rarely does it ever 'define' it.

Why not? Because according to Genesis, *"We were made in the image of God."*

One of the results of being made in God's image is that, 'like God,' we have the innate ability to tell the difference between good and evil, right and wrong.

For example, nobody has to tell us that 'murder' is wrong. We know it's wrong. Who told us that? Nobody! We just know it! In fact, we know that a lot of things are wrong!

How? Because God hard-wired a 'sin detector' in every one of us, it's called a 'conscience.' And every time you sin, whether you admit it or not, you know it.

Now you can try and break your 'conscience,' or 'turn it off' if you want, and you might even think you've succeeded but it's impossible. In fact, the best you can do is to just ignore it.

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Now, we've been talking about the nation of Israel in Numbers and watching as God prepared them to journey into the desert to the promised land.

Because He's traveling with them, they don't have the luxury of covering over or ignoring their sin.

God is holy and His people have to be holy too. If they're not, He either has to abandon them, or destroy them.

Like we talked about last week, when holiness comes in contact with unholiness, we die!

So, all through the book of Numbers, we're going to see God pausing every once in a while to remind the Israelites of His laws.

It's not because He wants them to do religious busy work. NO! The laws were designed to keep them alive!

The laws of God against sin aren't just meaningless regulations they're the way to life and blessing in God's presence.

With them, we live! Without them, we die! Life in all its fullness means a life lived in the presence of God, according to His Law!

The Israelites had to be instructed on how to deal with the sin that was inevitably going to enter their camp.

We're the same way. We're on a journey with God to the promised land of heaven, and on this journey we need to know how to deal with the sins that we are GOING to commit!

So why does God give these specific laws at this specific point in Numbers 5? Well, think about it.

God has just organized the camp with the tribes situated around the tabernacle in a square.

Then He's put the priests between Him and the people for their own protection, but now He wants to give them some examples of what they need to do if certain sins occur.

So, after 4 chapters on holiness, this chapter is all about sin and how to deal with it.

There are three case studies in this chapter, and each of them deals with a different issue and shows us a different way to deal with sin in our lives.

In each case, God is teaching the Israelites, and us, how to counteract the sins that are a danger to our existence.

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The first case study teaches us that inherited sin is DEATH.

Numbers 5:1-4, "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 they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them." The Israelites did so; they sent them outside the camp. They did just as the LORD had instructed Moses."

This first case study is pretty blunt. A person could make themselves ritually impure by making contact with anything that had to do with death.

See, God is a God of life, and anything that has to do with death is the exact opposite! It's like matter and anti-matter. So, God gives three different examples.

Obviously when you touch a dead body you made contact with death, but what about a discharge of any kind?

Well, that usually means blood and the loss of it moves you into the realm of death. A skin disease, like leprosy, would slowly eat away your flesh and is kind of a living death.

Now to us, the whole thing seems a little ridiculous. I mean, why should somebody be shut out from God just because He has a certain medical condition?

Or, why would you be unfit to be in God's presence for getting someone's body ready for burial.

Seems a little ludicrous, doesn't it? But before you pass judgment on God, stop for a moment, and listen to how these laws are intended to reveal a very deep truth about our sin problem.

In our society, we think the only thing standing between us and God is our behavior so, if I'm a good person, God will accept me and if I'm a bad person, God will reject me. Right?

Wrong! It's much deeper than that! Our problem isn't just in saying bad words or doing bad things it's WHO WE ARE at our core that alienates us from God!

Each of us is born with what the Bible calls a "sin nature." That's the creepy dark side of us that would give even Stephen King the willies!

Now, just as sure as leprosy devours flesh, our sin nature is consuming our souls! We're like dead men walking, ZOMBIES so to speak.

We're surrounded by the living dead! Our friends, neighbors, relatives, people we work with are *The Walking Dead!*

The Book of Numbers is trying to teach us that SIN isn't just about what we DO, it's about our very nature as a human being in this world.

Because we're sinful at the core of our being, even our righteous deeds, i.e. helping the homeless, giving to the poor, helping my neighbor fix his car, etc. defiles me and everyone with whom I come into contact.

By NATURE, I'm defiled and unclean, so I defile everything I touch! There's absolutely nothing I can do to present myself acceptable before God.

Therefore, in order to be admitted into God's presence, the root problem had to be dealt with:

- If the problem was a discharge, the person needed to be washed clean before he could reenter the camp.
- If it was a skin disease, their flesh needed to be made whole before they could be let back into camp.

In fact, did you know that when Paul cries out in Romans 7:24, *"Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* (sin nature), that was the exact same thing a leper had to cry while outside the camp?

Of course, the answer to their question was NOBODY! *"Nobody can deliver you, not even yourself!"*

So here we stand, like lepers outside the camp, crying out to God, *"Who will deliver me from this body of death."*

"Who will deliver me from this sinful nature, this sinful habit that I can't overcome? This addiction that defeats me and mocks me?" There's a deathly silence because no one can help us! We need a miracle!

And that's exactly what we get! See, just like the Israelites, you and I are hopelessly alienated from God. We're permanently stuck outside the camp! The sooner we realize that the better.

Thankfully, the answer to the leper's cry is found in Romans 7:25, *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

Jesus is the miracle we need! He's the one Who's come to deliver us from death and wash us clean. In Luke 8:43-48 we read about a woman who would fall into the Old Testament category of "unclean."

She had an emission of blood that wouldn't stop. She'd gone from one doctor to the next, but nothing worked. Desperate, she came to Jesus.

According to Numbers 5, this was an extremely dangerous thing to do; to bring herself in contact with the Holy One of Israel.

No wonder when Jesus stopped and demanded to know who'd touched Him, she came forward trembling!

She was scared to death! But Jesus was trying to show her that He was her 'healer,' not her 'condemner!'

He healed her and even though she had been alienated from God's people, now she was allowed to come back because of His miraculous touch.

The same thing happened when Jesus touched lepers. They were made whole! So He told them to go show themselves to the priest, just as the law required.

Notice, Jesus never said, *"Well that's a stupid law, I think I'll abolish it."* No, He dealt with the deeper issue, the person's condition, so they could enter into God's presence.

Now listen, the problem of separation from God in the Old Testament still exists, that hasn't changed but it's solved by Jesus in the New Testament.

He came to deal with the living death in our souls by washing our hearts clean. He came to take us from death and bring us into life!

How? By taking on Himself the very uncleanness that kept us from God.

The Bible tells us that He was taken outside the city of Jerusalem to be crucified. Hebrews 13:11 tells us, *"And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood."*

In other words, He dealt with our sin problem once and for all, so that we don't have to be outsiders anymore.

He made us HOLY by His death so that we wouldn't be condemned to an eternity away from the presence of God!

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Case study two is found in verses 5-10. It teaches us that deliberate sin is INSULTING to God.

Numbers 5:5-10, *"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 and 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.'"*

Now this time, instead of talking about sins that are outside of our control, God is talking about sins that are premeditated.

In the Bible it's called a 'transgression.' It's knowingly and willingly breaking a KNOWN law of God!

These verses are reminding us that, when we sin, it hurts more than just our relationship with God, it hurts our relationship with others, i.e. our kids, our work associates, our wives and husbands, etc.

Nobody ever sins in a vacuum! So, in order to deal with the sin you must work in both directions.

In verse 7, this unnamed man or woman is recognizing publicly that a wrong has been committed, and we see them confessing it.

Taking responsibility for your sins is critical in dealing with it. As long as you're excusing it, or rationalizing it, maybe even blaming somebody else for it, you can't confess it.

But it takes more than confession to make it right. You have to make 'restitution.'

Verse 7 says that not only did they have to pay back whatever they took, but they needed to add 20%.

Whoever commits the sin, doesn't just say they're sorry, they have to do everything in their power to make it right!

If that person was dead, you made restitution to a close relative. If there's no relative, then payment was given as an offering to the Lord.

But the worst part of any intentional sin isn't what it does to our relationship with others, it's what it does to our relationship to God. We have to make that right too!

In verse 8, after confession and restitution, the sinning party was required to offer a ram or a lamb to make atonement before God.

What that tells me is, even after confession and restitution, there STILL needs to be a sacrifice.

The Bible says, "*the wages of sin is death*" and that wage HAS to be paid, either by you or someone else.

The problem is, I don't have enough rams, or good works or whatever, to pay the debt I've racked up against God! Again, we need Jesus! He's the sacrificial lamb Who died for our sins.

1 John 2:2 says, "*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*"

Jesus had to die to pay the penalty for our sin, and that penalty was death itself. Nothing else would do!

He took our place in death to satisfy the justice of a Holy God, and to cover, that's what atonement means, the offense that my sin caused Him.

If you've committed an intentional sin, you can't just act like it doesn't matter, YOU HAVE TO DEAL WITH IT!

Slide 5

And now we come to the third and final example of sin that God deals with, and that is the sin of UNFAITHFULNESS.

Numbers 5:11-15, "*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), 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.*"

He must also take an offering of a tenth of an ephah of barley flour on her behalf. He must not pour olive oil on it or put incense on it, because it is a grain offering for jealousy, a reminder-offering to draw attention to wrongdoing.”

In verses 11-31, we have the case of a woman who's suspected of marital unfaithfulness. There's no proof that she did it, but she's being accused of it.

So, to deal with this, she is asked to do something that, to us, sounds crazy. Again, don't judge prematurely, because God wants to teach us another very important lesson about sin.

That is, in His eyes, when we sin against Him, it's unfaithfulness. It's spiritual adultery!

So, here's this woman accused of stepping out on her husband, but there's no conclusive proof; it's just a strong suspicion that something's going on.

I don't know what it is, but if your spouse is stepping out on you, call it a sixth sense if you like, but you know it!

So, when he brings the charge against his wife, he also has to bring a grain offering. The grain offering was given to symbolize submission to a superior. In this case, God.

Meanwhile, the priest would prepare a cup, containing a mixture of holy water and sacred dust from the floor of the tabernacle.

The woman would then stand before the Lord with her hair down, symbolizing the potential broken covenant of marriage, and the priest would charge her with an oath.

"If you haven't been faithful, then this water won't cause you any harm... but if you have... then may you become childless!" The woman then had to respond, "Amen" or so be it!

The priest would then write the curses on a scroll which he would then wash off into the water, and the woman would have to drink it, emphasizing that she would literally have to eat her words if she was lying.

The water was called, "bitter water" because of the bitter outcome if she was guilty. The curse would be that her abdomen would swell up and she would be unable to bear children.

On the other hand, if she was innocent, the curse wouldn't have any effect. Now understand, nobody was presuming this woman's guilt or innocence, but they were putting the judgment totally in God's hands.

Now in all of this, God is teaching an important lesson about sin. From God's perspective Israel was His wife. He had entered into a covenant relationship with her, and so He was her husband.

If she sinned, she was playing the part of adulterous wife and He has every right to bring her to trial and make her drink the bitter cup of His wrath.

If you know anything about the history of the Jewish race, you know that that happened not once, but multiple times over the coming years.

In fact, in Isaiah 51 and Ezekiel 23, we see God giving His unfaithful bride a bitter cup to swallow. And since Israel was definitely guilty as charged, how can she escape the curse?

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Conclusion

Let's bring this down to where we are this morning. I'm not going to try and whitewash it.

If you have a relationship with Jesus Christ and then you go out and sin, THEN you've been playing the part of the unfaithful wife.

The joy and excitement of your relationship with Christ has dried up! You're drinking the 'bitter cup' of your life of sin. As a result, you're depressed, you're ashamed, and you're miserable.

On the outside it may look like you're married to Christ, i.e. you still go to church, you still talk the talk, but in reality you're chasing other gods.

You have other lovers, you love your entertainment, your job, your "things" more than you love God. And if brought before God, you would be branded an adulterer.

So, what do you do? Well, again you have to confess the truth about your sin but thankfully, you don't have to continue to drink the "bitter cup" of remorse and pain.

You can be restored to your former relationship. How? Because Jesus has come to our rescue. He has taken the bitter cup for us!

Remember what He said at the Last Supper as he lifted the cup? Luke 22:20, *"In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"*

In order for Him to share that cup of redemption with us, it had to become a bitter cup of suffering to Him!

Jesus is the answer to the problem of the guilty adulterous wife, that's you and that's me! Jesus dealt with my sin so I could come, just as I am, to a Holy God.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. It doesn't matter whether your problem is defilement, transgression or spiritual adultery.

Jesus Christ has paid the price for you and for me. He made it possible for us to draw close to God and receive His blessings, not His curses.