

"Your Camp Shall Be Holy"

When I get back home from a multiple day **backpacking trip**, usually the first thing I do is take a **shower**. I usually have dirt and filth covered from **head to toe**. Of course, I take extra precaution to make sure I don't get that filth all over the house. Most of us don't like dirt and filth all over the house. That's why we have **vacuum cleaners** and brooms and all sorts of things to clean up our places.

We'll this passage talks about filth in **Israel's camp site**. I'll be focusing today's message on **verses 9-14**, and it talks about keeping Israel's camp clean. Just as you and I try to keep our homes and bodies clean, God called Israel to keep its camp clean. Even **outward filth** needed to be removed from the camp. We'll as we study this passage, we'll see that it connects this cleanliness of the camp with holiness. God uses the **outward filth** that could collect in the camp without certain precautions as a way to teach the people **about holiness**.

Just look at verse 14. "Your camp shall be holy." That's the exhortation from this passage. Today we will think again about the **church's call** to holiness. Here, as is typical in the old covenant, God required Israel's **outward actions** to reflect their holy status. These **outward requirements** for Israel should cause us to ask a **similar question** under the new covenant. How ought our living reflect our special status as **God's holy people**? What can we learn here about how we should pursue holiness, in the new covenant?

And so in light of this passage, we'll think about this **holiness** in light of our **filth**. What things make us ultimately filthy, and what can cleanse us from this filth? Well, hopefully you already know the answer, but let's study this passage and think more thoroughly through this.

Let's begin first with an analysis of this passage in **verses 9-14**. The setting for this passage is in verse 9. It's an **army camp**. In fact in the Hebrew, the word for army camp appears **seven times** in these **six verses**. The focus is on this temporary place where the army will reside when going out to battle. Of course, as it points out in verse 9, the army goes out against its enemies. In other words, the setting is in the midst of a war, when the army will be settled in an army camp. These provisions in verses 9-14 all deal with keeping the army camp clean and holy.

A **warning** is then given to them in verse 9. Keep yourself from every wicked thing. Now, of course, this is something that would **always be true**. They should always look to keep themselves from every wicked thing. But think about how especially pertinent from a **human perspective** this would be. When do we *really* want God to be with us? When we're **in trouble**. When we're faced with danger. Well, here in Israel's army camp, they are faced with an enemy. And yet if **God was with** them, they **need not fear**. Look at verse 14. It reminds them that it's God who gives them the victory over their enemies. Now, more than ever, Israel would have a vested interest to have **God's presence** among them. They wouldn't want to risk doing **some wicked thing** that would make God's presence leave them. That's the concern **presented here** under the old covenant. They're called to holy and righteous living

especially in their army camp, so that God's presence wouldn't leave them at this crucial moment.

You might remember Israel's history in Joshua chapter 7. There Israel is encamped as an army. They engage in battle, and they suffer losses from the men of Ai. Joshua 7 tells us the reason. Because one person in the camp had done a wicked thing. A man named Achan had taken some of the military spoil that God had specifically forbidden. It had brought guilt upon the entire camp. The next battle Israel lost and had to flee before its enemies. Joshua 7:12 explains their state now because of this:

Joshua 7:12, the LORD says, "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you."

God tells the Israelites in their army camp that he would not be with them anymore. Why? Because Achan's sin defiled the holiness of the army camp. The people were called to deal with the sin first, then God's presence would go with them into battle. So, what I want us to notice in this passage, that in the old covenant, the peoples' righteousness and holiness was tied up with God's presence among them. The old covenant held the threat that God's presence might be temporarily removed from them as a people if the army camp wasn't kept holy. This wasn't just an empty threat. It would actually later happen many times; Joshua 7 is just one example.

You see this reason stated simply in verse 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." You see, it's God's presence in the army camp that is the reason for these provisions. You see laws of cleanness especially in the Torah concerning the Tabernacle. God's presence in the Tabernacle required them to approach God in cleanness. Well, here we see this need for cleanness applied to the entire army camp. The Tabernacle must be kept holy; nothing unclean must come before the special presence of God. And here in the army camp, it's similar. God's special presence would be with them in the army camp, and so they were called to treat the camp in earthly cleanness. Now this would have been extra requirements for Israel, something else for them to keep track of, and yet I think it would especially be a comfort to them. God offered to be with them when they went into battle!

Now when you dig into the two specific provisions for holiness and cleanness in this passage, it's a bit surprising. Verse 9 warned against general wickedness in the army camp. You might expect to hear then about a series of moral laws. But verses 10-13 turn to deal not with laws of moral righteousness, but two hygiene laws that serve a ceremonial purpose here. They both deal with what you might refer to as natural pollutions. The first provision is in verses 10-11; this describes the process for handling nocturnal emissions. The person upon discovering this, would need to go out of the camp for the day, until evening. Then he can return to the camp, but only after washing himself. Basically, he'll be considered ceremonially unclean until that point, and must stay outside the camp until then.

The second provision is in verses 12-13. This is, simply put, a requirement to form a latrine outside the camp - a place to go to the bathroom outside the camp. Verse 12 is basically saying that this is supposed to be some

clearly recognized and known place. It's specifically set up outside the camp. In other words, everyone should know where this designated place should be. And then there should be some tool, like a hand shovel for example, that can be used to cover up the human refuse that is deposited at this site.

And so these are both natural pollutions that God tells Israel to handle outside of the camp. These are considered unclean, but realize they are not unnatural. Obviously there's nothing morally wrong, for example, with going to the bathroom. We all have to go to the bathroom. These functions described here are natural and normal. And yet for good reason, we know that even in our own society we don't go around without cleaning up from these natural emissions. Take our bathrooms for example. We have bathrooms, with toilets that flush. We have sinks with running water to wash ourselves up with. We have air-fresheners and ceiling fans. If you have to use an outhouse, they use chemicals in the hole to try to break down the materials and deal with the smell. When we go camping out in the backcountry, most of us will follow something similar to verses 12-13. If you have a baby, you know that changing a poopie diaper is not very fun. You might even have a diaper genie to store the dirty diapers, or otherwise you keep them outside away from the house.

Why do we make all these provisions for dealing with human waste today? Because even though going to the bathroom is a normal human process, we know there is something revolting about it. And so these sorts of provisions for dealing with natural human waste are good for hygiene and just appealing to our senses. We have an aversion to this sort of filth, frankly. And so here in Deuteronomy, we could understand these provisions merely as sanitary provisions. And yet Moses makes them about more than just good hygiene. He relates them to God's presence among the people. He takes our common human experience, acknowledges how we perceive human waste as filthy, and relates that to God. He describes God as having a similar sort of revulsion to this human waste as we would. It's almost like he's saying, if we'd clean up like this for ourselves, we should especially clean up like this if we know God is coming over. And yet I hope you realize that this is like so many of the other ceremonial laws. This looks beyond just external filth. Moses uses this external pollution and filth to point us to the real internal filth we need to deal with. Verse 9 told them from the start that they should be concerned to keep the camp free of every wicked thing. It's the wickedness that really pollutes us. That's what really turns God away from us. These sanitary laws paint a picture of how God is revolted, not so much by human waste, but the filth of human sin.

Of course passages like Mark 7:14-23 help give us this interpretation. Please turn there with me now in your Bibles. This is a passage we've talked a lot about recently. This is where the Pharisees are criticized for adding more man-made laws of external cleanness. It's as if they saw the laws in the Old Testament on hygiene and cleanness and thought that external cleanness was an end in itself. They made more and more laws that dealt with external cleanness. But Jesus said they missed the point. They needed to deal with internal cleanness. Instead of adding to the external laws of cleanness in the Old Testament, they should have recognized the spiritual thrust of those laws. Look at Mark 7:19. Interestingly, in Mark 7:19 Jesus tells them that it's not what comes into a man that makes him unclean, because that goes into the stomach and is eliminated. It's eliminated, Jesus says. That's bathroom language. Think of our passage for today in Deuteronomy. Jesus says that human waste doesn't make you really unclean.

He goes on to say in Mark 7:20 that what comes out of a man defile him. But you see he's not talking about human excrement there. He goes on to talk about **all the sins** that come out of a man - they defile a man.

Do you see the point? Jesus' words help us to **interpret our passage** in Deuteronomy. Human waste doesn't really make us filthy and unclean. It's the every wicked thing that will make us unclean. It's those sins that come up from our filthy hearts that make us unclean. Jesus says we need to look for **inward purity**; to clean out the refuse that's coming from deep inside us. That's a pretty hard job, isn't it? We can setup a latrine outside our camp, but how do we get the filth out of our hearts? We can **wash our hands** using antibacterial soap and kill 99.9% of all germs and bacteria, but what can we personally do to clean our souls?

And yet the prophet Isaiah **prophesied of a solution**. Flip over to Isaiah chapter 4. **Isaiah 4:4** talks about how one day the Lord would wash away the filth of the daughters of Zion by his Spirit. That's amazing. He prophesies that God would be the one to wash away our filth. I hope you understand this is a **metaphor** for the spiritual cleansing we have in Christ! This is obviously looking forward to how Christ would cleanse our hearts from sin. And Isaiah talks about this being accomplished **via the Spirit**. Well, that's what we see in the New Testament. Christ achieves the cleansing on the cross, but he applies it via the Spirit.

Just think of how we see this on the **day of Pentecost**. The work of Christ is applied to believers via the Spirit. Jesus had promised the disciples that he would not leave us. He accomplishes that by **sending his Spirit** into our hearts. The Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter 2 is part of the fulfillment of God's promise to **wash away** our filth. The Holy Spirit is poured out on us and God begins the cleanup of our hearts! And yet think how wonderful this is for Christians. Here **in Deuteronomy 23**, the people of God had to be concerned that God's presence would leave them if they didn't clean up their filth themselves. For us, once the Holy Spirit is in our hearts, we never **have to worry** about him leaving. He moves in permanently. Instead of being revolted by the filth of sin in our hearts, he gets out the broom and the mop, so to speak, and begins to clean us on the inside. He's working on those aspects of unrighteousness that have flown out of our hearts.

The real cleansing of filth that we need is on the **inside**. As we believe in Jesus, as we turn our lives over to him by faith, he begins the cleansing of our lives. That's our sanctification. If you've never believed on Jesus, I urge you to do so today, and find **real cleansing** from the filth of sin.

As Christians now, we have an **interesting call**. If we are really believers, the Holy Spirit will be cleansing us all our lives. That's our **sanctification**. It's his work inside us. And yet, God calls us to **nonetheless to strive** for purity. In other words, we in the new covenant are also called to holy living. We're called to **pursue holiness**. In the light of the New Testament, we see clearly that the Spirit will work this in us. And yet we're still called to work at it; to labor at holiness and purity. We're still called **to put away the filth** of sin in our lives. When we do, we can know that the Spirit's at work. But that doesn't take away from God's call to us to pursue it. God often works through our own efforts. That doesn't take away **from it being grace**. Actually, the fact that we even desire to put away the filth of sin is a **testimony** of God having already been working on our hearts. Apart from Christ, sin doesn't seem that filthy to us. Christ's Spirit helps us to **realize how filthy** sin really is.

So given the fact that God continues to call us to pursue holiness, what are those things that threaten to defile us? There are many things, but I'll point out two things that especially come to mind in light of this passage in Deuteronomy. First, you have the more obvious things. Things like idols. For example, 2 Corinthians 6:16 talks about God walking among us as the reason why we should stay away from idols. That's using the language of verse 14 in our passage for today. God's walking among the army camp of Israel meant they must pursue holiness. That's the same reason 2 Corinthians 6:16 says we should stay away from idols; because God's presence is inside us as Christians. Certainly the idols threaten to defile us. Certainly all wickedness would threaten to defile us, and work against the cleansing that the Spirit is doing inside us.

Another thing that threatens to defile us now as Christians can be seen in Philippians 3:8. We read that earlier in the service. There Paul went through his whole list of credentials as a zealous Jew and Pharisee. But Paul calls all that rubbish according to the NKJV. Well, a good case can be made that the word translated as rubbish would be better translated as "dung." The Greek word was probably a bit crass, frankly. But do you see what Paul is saying? His old religious pedigree had become as revolting as human waste. And so if Paul can say that, then it stands as a warning to us not to put confidence in false religious ideas. Paul's ethnic heritage and religious pedigree was of no value in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No external holiness or ceremonial procedures would be of value now that the real cleansing had come in Christ. If we are looking to remove all those things that defile us, that includes putting trust in any false religion or any focus that takes us away from Christ.

Brothers and sisters, do we see these sins, and all sins, as filthy? Do we see them worse than physical filth? This passage has reminded us ultimately of how our sin defiles us. Are we revolted by our sin? We know how earthly filth can revolt us. But do we have that same response to sin in our lives? Or are you maybe someone obsessed with keeping your earthly homes clean, but don't have the same devotion on the cleanliness of your heart? We thank the Holy Spirit as we see him changing our attitude on this. We all know that some people have different standards of cleanliness than others. Some people live in filthy homes, and either don't care or don't realize it. Other people are so clean it's actually become an obsession. Well, the Holy Spirit is at work to change our attitude on spiritual filth. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will make us obsessed with having clean hearts, free from the defilements of the world.

As Christians, we thank God that he cleanses our hearts, but let us not resist his cleansing work by playing in the filth, so to speak. Whoever is in charge of cleaning the house at your home can know how frustrating it is when they spend all afternoon cleaning the place, only to have a spouse or child come home and instantly track in dirt and mud all over the clean floor. Hours of cleaning can be displaced by seconds of careless actions. I'm guilty of this sometimes in our home. Well, the Holy Spirit is at work inside us to clean our hearts. Let us not be carelessly tracking in more filth into our hearts at the same time. Let us be on guard against these defilements of wickedness. Let us look to flee the devil and every temptation of sin. Let's look to work with the Holy Spirit instead of working against the Holy Spirit in our sanctification.

One final encouragement here. Remember that the context for our passage is the **army camp**. God's presence would go with them on the battlefield to meet their enemy. This is true for us all the more under the new covenant. Everywhere we go, the Holy Spirit is with us. Not just when we gather together on Sundays, though certainly especially then. But even **every day** when we go out into the world, God is with us each **individually**. **The Spirit's presence is constantly with us**. We are like each portable army camps of God when go throughout our days. I don't say this to take away from the corporate aspect of our life as Christians. Rather, I just want to point out how great it is under the new covenant with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Think about that. In the old covenant, you could **be left alone**, outside the camp, just because of a **natural pollution**. You'd probably feel most vulnerable at that time to your enemies, not to mention even wild animals. It'd probably be a bit scary to say the least. And yet in the new covenant, God so clearly promises that he will always be with us and never leave us. This is **encouraging**, because our enemies as Christians are all around us. The **devil** constantly prowls around looking to devour us. **Others** tempt us to sin. **We tempt** ourselves even. These all look to defile us. These are **opposed** to the way of Christ. Yet the Spirit strengthens us that we can overcome these temptations. And then when we go out to share Christ with others, and to live Christ before others, we know there will obstacles. People might persecute us. People might reject us. But God is still **with us** then. God will give us the **victory**. For those who do respond to the message of the gospel given through us, that's a sign of God's victory right then and there. Others who persist in rejecting the truth will meet judgment on the last day. But God will have the victory. We together with God and all Christ's people will have the victory. Let's have this confidence before us wherever we go. That God is with us always, and that means nothing can be against us.

And so, the Holy Spirit of the Holy God is inside us. Let us pursue holiness, even as he is cleansing us from the inside out. Let us believe and trust that he will do this, even as we labor to **put off every defilement**. Amen.

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