

Godly People

Exodus 22:16-31

How many people remember having a summer job growing up?

One of the jobs I had growing up was at a golf course.

I worked in the 'back shop' which wasn't really a shop it just meant I worked outside in the back.

My job was to get clubs loaded and unloaded from carts, clean clubs after a player was done their round, and always make sure there were enough golf balls out on the driving range.

I have found generally speaking that golf is a sport that most people either love or hate.

I know the reason I landed that summer job is because I loved golf.

The summer before I got that job, I had saved up all my money from another summer job and I bought a junior golf membership at that course.

One of the things I became notorious for was practice.

I hit hundreds of golf balls every day.

I remember one time very early in the season I hit so many balls that my hand started bleeding, so I went into the pro shop and asked for some tape and then kept hitting balls.

Of course there is a big downside to playing golf all summer and that is I didn't earn very much money which meant the following year I couldn't afford to buy the membership, but it turned out that they were hiring.

I applied and got the job. My boss told me the reason I got the job was because he saw me practicing the summer before and figured that I was a hard worker and that I knew something about golf.

Anyone who likes to golf knows there is a bit of a culture to the game and when you play with other people or the game comes up in conversation it is pretty easy to tell if another person is a golfer or not.

A golfer will own their own clubs, likely be wearing golf shoes, know the typical dress code, know when it is their turn to hit the ball, know many of the rules, and if they are really extreme watch it on TV.

You just know by the things a person says and does that they are a golfer or just happen to be playing a round of golf.

I think that is true of a lot of things in life.

You can learn a great deal about someone by the things they say and do.

That is certainly true of godly people.

[Our text this morning is **Exodus 22:16-31**. In very 31 the LORD says, “You (plural) are to be my holy people.” That is you are to be distinct or set apart as belonging to God. He says that in the context of giving the people of Israel rules for everyday living. It is important that we connect God’s giving of His law and being known as belonging to Him. Following God’s ways is one of the most significant ways we demonstrate that we belong to God. In John 14-15 Jesus repeatedly says, “If you love me you will obey my commands.” In our verses this morning we are given four character traits of godly people. Of course there are more, but there are certainly not less. Here is the first...]

Point #1 – Godliness requires self-control.

A life that reflects a relationship with God is one that demonstrates the capacity to wage war against sinful desires.

Jesus was asked questions about marriage on a number of occasions and one of the things He does to answer those questions is He goes back to the very beginning when God first creates Adam and Eve.

Now you don’t have to read very far into the Bible before you realize that people often disregard God’s design, but the failure of people to live according to God’s design never changes God’s design.

The seventh command of the Ten Commandments is, as we would expect consistent with God’s creative plan.

It says, “You shall not commit adultery”.

It is that command that forms the basis of what it says here in 22:16-17.

A man and woman are not to sleep together before they are married and if they do the man must pay the bride price and they are to be married unless the girl’s “father absolutely refuses”.

God makes this rule because He has designed a man and a woman to be bound together as if they are one person.

It is an inescapable reality that ignoring this rule has a dramatically negative impact on future marriages.

Yes, I know, a number of people will point to examples of good marriages despite mistakes in their youth, and by God’s grace I believe that is possible, but it is always better to obey the LORD right from the start.

The heart of what is written here is that people will avoid such things.

Despite the lies that are being told to young people today, it is possible to control yourself.

God has given us the capacity as human beings to gain control over our desires.

Now that ability has been severely damaged by our rebellion against God, but for those of us who have decided to turn from evil to God by faith in Christ we have the gift of the Holy Spirit Who gives us an increasing capacity for self-control as we grow up in Christ.

Self-control goes hand in hand with godliness.

[One of the chores I had growing up was mixing mortar for my dad to lay stone with. In think the mix was six shovels full of sand, 2 Portland cement, 1 masonry cement, and add water. You know the thing about mortar is that you need all of the ingredients to make a good mix. If you leave out the cement you might make a nice sand castle but it is not going to hold together very long.]

It's the same with being a godly person.

You can have some of the ingredients, but if you are missing something vital like self-control you won't be defined by godly character.

We are creatures of appetite and desire and many of them in the right context are good, but they need to be controlled.

We live in a time where it seems feelings rule the day.

If someone feels something or desires something then the world affirms that feeling or desire as something right and good.

It breaks my heart when I hear a believer talk like that because that is unchristian, I would go as far to say atheistic.

[God's people are not prisoners of their DNA, we are Holy Spirit filled new creatures in Christ and that should be on display in our character. In addition to self-control these verses show us a second thing God's people need if they are to be a holy people. The Lord makes it clear here that...]

Point #2 – Godliness requires a devoted heart.

Anyone who delights in the incomparable greatness of the Lord cannot offer their worship to another.

Verses 18-20 command the people of Israel to have absolutely zero tolerance for false religion.

To our modern ears I understand that this sounds extreme and it should sound extreme because it is and rightly so.

Of course it is very important that everyone understands that we need to see these verses in the light of the cross so that we apply them rightly to our lives.

We need to remember that the church is not the government and we are not the ones responsible to make laws and enforce them like it was in ancient Israel.

Most importantly we must remember that the time between Christ's first coming and His second is a period of grace where we call on sinners to turn away from their evil ways rather than put them to death.

Our primary weapon is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

While we are not supposed to put people to death, there is an important lesson for us here.

The lesson is that false religion must have no place in our hearts and minds.

That is exactly why God commands what He does in verses 18 & 20.

There are really only two religions in the world. There is true religion through faith in Christ and there is the religion of the devil (1 Corinthians 10) and what God is saying here is that His people must be diligent about keeping them separate.

I've been reading through Judges in my daily devotions and it is really clear that the Israelites did not obey God's instructions in these verses.

They repeatedly tolerated false religions and it repeatedly leads to the judgement and ultimately to their exile.

To entertain or validate false religion to any degree leads to continual idolatry and ungodliness.

[A few years ago I had a moth problem in my garage. They would come out in the evening and when I would open the door from the kitchen to the garage there were hundreds flying around. First I try swatting them but that took too long so I resorted to vacuuming them up with my shop vac. Every night I would get rid of all of them and the next night they would be back just as bad and the night before. After a couple of weeks of that I discovered a bag of bird seed that was filled with their larvae. Once I got rid of that they were gone in a day or so, but as long as that remained I made no progress.]

It is the same with godliness.

If we want to be godly we need to get rid of false religion in our hearts and minds. We need to be devoted to the One true triune God Who alone is LORD over all.

This is a danger for the church in our society.

Eastern mysticism has been woven into a number things.

Make up your own spirituality is all the rage in our time.

Astrology, psychics, self-actualization, contemplative prayer, and alike.

There is also ecumenicalism that says that all religions are equally valid.

That is nothing short of contempt for Christ and hatred for people.

[Jesus is the only way to be saved brothers and sisters, let us not be afraid to say it. While we absolutely need to be respectful and try to lovingly persuade others to the truth, we must never give ground in the church to false religion. Instead we must be wholeheartedly devoted to the LORD. Here is a third lesson about being godly...]

Point #3 – Godly people are compassionate.

Someone who loves the LORD will seek to serve people rather than take advantage of them.

Verses 21-27 tell us about some people in difficult circumstances.

I love the fact that God allows people to come to Him regardless of birthplace, skin colour, or any physical attribute.

Anyone could show up in Israel and renounce their former way of life and embrace Yahweh and His Word.

God says if anyone from another country shows up and wants to become a part of my people make sure you treat them right.

To be a widow or an orphan in the ancient world usually would mean severe hardship.

Desperate people can be easily taken advantage of because they are often willing to do anything to survive.

Don't do that, God says!

If you lend money to someone in need it says here “charge him no interest.”

You may take a pledge from someone (like collateral) but if the pledge is his cloak give it back at night so he can be warm while he sleeps.

In other words don't use vulnerable people for selfish gain, but instead act with kindness towards them.

God gives us the reason at the end of verse 27. Do you see it there?

If a vulnerable person cries out to the LORD, God will hear (act) because He is “compassionate.”

That is exactly what being godly is all about. It is about imitating the character of our heavenly Father.

He is compassionate; therefore, we ought to be compassionate.

[At any given time I seem to have a number of projects on the go and sometimes my children like to help out. Quite some time ago I was working on something a Kevin was helping and at

some point he looked up at me and said, “Dad I want to be a worker just like you, except I’m not going to be bald!” I laughed, but it also warmed my heart.]

If we want to be like someone we need to do the things that they do, right?

If we want to be godly we can’t be known for cheating and taking advantage of people.

We need to be known for helping and serving people in need.

[There is one last quality of godliness for us in the last few verses of this chapter. This is one that is particularly applicable to us as we live through these days of pandemic. I have moments of great frustration in this situation. Anybody with me on that? I’m not a fan of how our government has handled things so far and so I/we really need the reminder that is given here in verses 28-31. It is this...]

Point #4 – Godly people willfully live under God’s sovereignty.

The LORD of all creation orders our lives and His people should live like we believe that.

Verse 28 tells us this...

Blasphemy is saying something about God that isn’t true, or hating God for Who He is.

It is very interesting that He puts blasphemy and cursing the leaders of a nation side by side.

Romans 13 helps us to understand why the two are closely related. It is because God is the One Who places people in authority over us.

Please understand this does not mean we have to like or approve of everything our leaders do.

There is whole bunch of stuff I hate about our government because it is steeped in evil actions and philosophy.

I think we should pray that our government would either change direction or be changed altogether.

In our society we can vote and we should exercise that right.

But for today our government is what it is and we need to understand that God is over all rulers and powers and He calls us trust Him with the final judgement of everyone who has authority over us.

Verse 29 commands the people to “not hold back offerings from granaries or vats.”

God asks His people give out of their resources to sustain the worship life in the nation.

To understand this command we need to ask the question why does the grain grow and why are grapes produced in the first place?

Because God graciously allows it!

When we give a portion of our resources to Him we are doing so out of a recognition that everything comes from Him.

At the end of verse 29 and into verse 30 God commands the dedication of all the first born in Israel. The boys to be redeemed and the animals to be sacrificed in worship.

That looks back to God's deliverance of the people from Egypt and it also looks forward to God giving Christ on our behalf.

Which raises the question, "Why does God save people?" On account of His Sovereign Grace.

Godly people know that and trust in that.

[Have you ever seen someone walk a tight rope? Some people have walked across a tight rope over Niagra Falls. I would never do that because I know I would fall after the first step or two. But what if someone could 100% guarantee that they would keep me from falling, well then it wouldn't be a matter of ability it would be a matter of trust. Do I trust the person who has promised to keep me safe?]

God nowhere in His word promises to make our lives easy.

God nowhere in His word says that we are always going to like the people in authority over us.

God nowhere in His word says that if you give Him an offering He will give you ten times as much.

He simply says live like you trust Him.

The Lord wants us to be Holy!

He wants our lives to be a positive reflection of what it means to be in relationship with Him.

He wants us to be people of self-control, to have devoted hearts, to be people of compassion, and to live like He is in charge of everything.

Oh Holy Spirit make it so in us today!