

March 29, 2015 by Darryn Wiebe



God's Requirement

Micah 6

1. Pray (John 17:15-17).
2. Forgive (John 8:1-11).
3. Reach Out (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

One of the clearest verses in all of the Bible that explains the gospel is found in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Through our sin, we earn the consequences: our death. But, through God's grace, we are given a gift: eternal life. "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We simply need to believe in Jesus, who gave Himself for us on the cross. And through faith, God gives us eternal life -- that is, life without death! We earn our death, we are given our life. This is the gospel. We, who deserved to die, are given life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

My message this morning is entitled, "The wages of sin." I saw a vivid illustration of these things this past week. Karen's mother, Mary Jane passed away on Friday. On Thursday morning, the family was called in because Mary Jane's health had taken a turn for the worse. So, they called in the family and pulled all of the tubes that had kept her alive. And it was simply a matter of time until she passed away. When I came, the whole family was there. Phil, Karen, and their two children. I was privileged to be able to come and be with the family in those sacred hours. Being with them, watching someone die, talking with them, reading the Scripture with them, praying with them, waiting for Mary Jane to breathe her last breath.

It's in those moments that life becomes clearer. Because, we are all headed toward our death-bed someday. And those moments, Moses' prayer rings true, "Teach us to number our days, that we may present to you a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). And one of the things that I told the family was that we have a living illustration of sin right before our eyes. See, it's because of sin that we were in that room. Because of sin, death entered the world.

Do you remember the garden of Eden? God said to Adam, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). And indeed, Adam and Eve sinned by eating of the tree. And indeed, Adam and Eve died. They died spiritually in being cast out of the garden, away from God's presence. They eventually died physically. Paul wrote in Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." And it was because of sin that we were there in that room, watching Karen's mother die.

But, we aren't without hope. Paul said later in Romans 5:19, "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." Adam's sin brought sin (and death) to us. But, the righteous life of Christ brought righteousness (and life) to us.

Well, this morning as we come to our text, we are going to be looking death in the face. And I hope to give you the hope of life that's in Christ. Turn in your Bibles to Leviticus 20.

This week brings us into some familiar territory. God is laying out for the people of Israel some sins to avoid. Many of them are nasty, sexual sins. In fact, most of these sins have already been mentioned in chapter 18. But, the one thing that is unique about this chapter is the consequences to the sin. Over and over and over again in this chapter we see the consequences of sin, which is death. Let's begin reading in verse 1, ...

Leviticus 20:1-5

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Say to the people of Israel, Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name. And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech.

Did you see the death penalty in these verses? You offer your child to Molech, and you shall "surely be put to death" (verse 2). The whole congregation of Israel shall come out and pelt you with stones until you die. Similar penalties come for other sins. Look at verses 9 and 10, ...

Leviticus 20:9-10

For anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon him. If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

We see this same pattern throughout this chapter. Verses 11-16 repeat the theme for various sexual sins. For incest (verses 11-12, 14), for homosexuality (verses 13), for bestiality (verses 15-16), the penalty is explicitly given: death. We read in verse 11, "both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them." In verse 12, "both of them shall surely be put to death; ... their blood is upon them." In verse 13, "they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them." Verse 14, "he and they shall be burned with fire." Verse 15, "he shall surely be put to death." And in verse 16, "they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them."

Penalties are also given in verses 17-21, though not quite as severe. The penalties here are exile and barrenness: "he shall bear his iniquity" (verse 17); "both of them shall be cut off from among their people" (verse 18); "they shall bear their iniquity" (verse 19); "they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless" (verse 20); and, "they shall be childless" (verse 21).

The lesson that we learn from Leviticus 20 is this: "The wages of sin is death." In this chapter, God spells out the sin, and he spells out the punishment.

What is surprising in this chapter is how God deals with such sin. In our society, we want to reform the sinner. We send people to prison, hoping that their time locked up will change their heart enough that they won't want to go back again. Have you ever considered what we call our worst prisons? They are called "penitentiaries," where criminals will become "penitent" for their lawlessness. They are called "correctional" facilities, where criminals will be "corrected" of their wayward ways. See, we in America want to change the behavior of the worst of our members.

But, the law of Leviticus 20 is different. Rather than seeking reform, the sentence of death is given. As Warren Wiersbe says, "God gave his law to restrain sin, not to reform sinners; the penalties He imposed were for the purpose of upholding His law, not improving the offenders." [1] When the lawless are destroyed, sin will be restrained. But when they aren't destroyed, sin will abound. Solomon observed that when, "the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Well, here in Leviticus 20, we see some of the offenses in the law that required the death penalty. These laws are merely an expression of God's hatred toward sin. Predominately, these sins are for deviant sexual behavior. So deviant that I have decided not even to read all of them publicly. You can go back home today and read them on your own if you like.

What a timely word for us in America. These sins are our sins. Few of us (if any) are unaffected by them. If we would follow these commands, perhaps half of our population could have been put to death by now.

Let's just think about this for a moment. Verses 1-5 speak about offering your child to Molech. This was child-sacrifice to an idol. And I believe that a direct application to our circumstances today is abortion, where we sacrifice our children upon the altar of inconvenience. After all, the children sacrificed are those who were the result of an "unwanted pregnancy." The penalty for killing your child in offering it to Molech was death (verses 1-5). We are nearing 55 million abortions in America since Roe v. Wade in 1973. [2] And if every mother and father of these children were killed, the population in America would be much smaller.

When it comes to adultery (verse 10), some 40% of first marriages end in divorce. [3] Now, of course, not every single one of these divorces were brought about by adultery. But, certainly, many were. And the punishment for adultery is death (verse 10).

Our land is quickly adopting homosexuality as a social norm, no longer looking upon it as sinful. In fact, it has now become sinful to look upon this lifestyle as sinful. And though the actual percentage of people in the United States who would claim an LGBT lifestyle is small (less than 5%), its pervasiveness is spreading. And few are those who don't know someone in this lifestyle. Lest we get too smug, thinking that these things only happen, "out there." Consider verse 9, ...

Leviticus 20:9

For anyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his blood is upon him.

Many children in our day and age would never see adulthood if these laws were followed. If America followed Leviticus 20, our population would be significantly less. That's simply an observation of the sin around us.

Do you realize that we live in Canaan? These sins are all around us! Oh, the United States may well have been founded upon Judeo-Christian values, but many of those values are long gone. We live in a sinful generation.

And as the Lord has pricked your heart this morning, may the Lord grant you repentance. May the Lord guide you to Jesus, where forgiveness may be found for all of these sins.

But, as I preach these things this morning, I trust that I'm preaching to the choir. I trust that you know these are sins. I trust that you hate these sins, as God hates them. And for some of you, I trust that you are thankful to God that we don't live in a society that kills such sinners, because you would have been dead by now. But, by the grace of God, you are now his child.

And my purpose this morning isn't to bang these sins home, calling you to turn from them. We know that abortion is a sin. We know that adultery is a sin. We know that homosexuality is a sin. But, the big question that I would like to tackle this morning is this: How are we to live, as followers of God in such a generation?

Of course, we don't live under the Mosaic Law, where such offenders were liable to the death penalty. Rather, they live and prosper. They

have political pull. So, how do we live?

And of course, as we have seen throughout all of Leviticus, the exhortation is the same. It's an exhortation to holiness. It is an exhortation to abstain from these sins. It is an exhortation to live differently than those in the land. It is an exhortation to be holy. In fact, it's right here in this text. Look at verses 7 and 8.

Leviticus 20:7-8

Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

I love verse 8, because it shows God's work in our walk. God is the one who sanctifies us. He is the one who guides us toward the paths of righteousness. Psalm 23:3 He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. And living in Canaan, we need to live a righteous and holy life. Verses 22 and following continue the theme:

Leviticus 20:22-26

"You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. But I have said to you, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

We should stand out as different than our society, where they go their wayward ways, and we walk the straight path that God has given to us. How should we live in our society?

1. Pray (John 17:15-17).

Turn with me to John 17. Shortly before He was arrested, Jesus prayed a prayer that we have recorded for us in John 17. It's called the high priestly prayer. And in that prayer, Jesus prays for his disciples with these words.

John 17:6-19

"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Jesus knew what awaited His disciples after He would leave. They would face tremendous persecution. Most of them would die by the sword in their witness to Christ. And yet, what does Jesus pray? "Don't take them out of the world!"

John 17:15-17

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

Though we live in Canaan. And though evil surrounds us on all sides, let us not lose hope. God has us here for a reason. And I think that the prayer of Jesus can easily be our prayer as well. "Oh, Lord, do not take us out of Canaan. But, keep us from the evil one. Lord, we are not of this world. This country is not our hope. We long for a better country. We long for heaven with all of its purity. Lord, sanctify us in the truth. Your word is truth."

Temptations to sin are all around us. We can easily get sucked into the world's ways. But we can turn to God who can keep us pure in such an evil society. Isn't this how Jesus taught us to pray? "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13).

Truth be known, prayer plays a crucial role in your holiness. If we will ever be people who keep away from such sins, it will be by God's grace. Let us never think that such things are beyond us, because, the moment that you do is the moment that you fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." So, how should we live in our society? Pray (John 17:15-17). And also, ...

2. Forgive (John 8:1-11).

Turn over to John, chapter 8. Here we have one of the most tender scenes in all of the Scripture. It details for us the account of the woman caught in adultery.

Now, I know that many of the earliest manuscripts don't contain this story. But, there is nothing in this text that would lead us to believe that this didn't happen. As Jesus is presented with the same spirit that he is presented throughout the Bible, full of grace and truth. And we see both grace and truth in this passage. Grace to the woman. And yet, truth spoken and upheld.

John 8:1-11.

but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?"

Note that in verse 5, when the people are quoting the law of Moses, they are referring to Leviticus 20:10, which is our text this morning. Note, also, that they didn't stone this woman according to the law. It's because Israel was under Roman rule at the time. They had no authority to put such people to death. That's why they brought Jesus to Pilate, calling on him to put Jesus to death. Note also why they brought such a concern to Jesus.

John 8:6

This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.

They weren't really interested in this woman. Nor were they interested in the truth. They were looking to trap Jesus. And the response He gives was perfect.

John 8:6

... Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

As if to give a dramatic pause.

John 8:7

And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

Ponder those words long and hard when you think about the sins of our society: Abortion and adultery and homosexuality. Before you throw rocks at them, examine your own sins first. And when you do that, it will give you a gracious compassion for those enslaved to their sin. Especially when you realize that your own sins make you deserving of death.

John 8:8-11

And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

What a great response! Jesus balanced grace and truth perfectly. There was grace to the woman. "Neither do I condemn you." There was truth to the woman. "Go and sin no more."

And as you consider responding to those in society who are trapped in these sorts of sins, seek a similar balance. Never backing down from the truth that God hates such sin. But, never lacking in love and grace for others.

If there is anything that you get from Leviticus 20, get this: God hate sin. But, if there is anything that you get from the spirit of the New Testament, get this: God is gracious.

And if you are anything like me, you have missed this balance on many occasions. There have been times in my life when I have come across as too condemning of the sin, full of truth, but no grace. There have been other times in my life when I have been silent regarding the sin, full of grace, but no truth. What this world needs is both. Truth that proclaims. Grace that forgives.

How should we live in our society? Pray (John 17:15-17), Forgive (John 8:1-11), and, ...

3. Reach Out (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

Turn to 1 Corinthians 5. Again, we see a passage that deals with sexual sin. In the first two verses, Paul describes the man who was sleeping with his father's wife, probably his step-mother. This was explicitly forbidden in Leviticus 20:11, "If a man lies with his father's wife, he has

uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them." And yet, the Corinthian church was celebrating this! Let's pick it up in verse 1, ...

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

My guess is that they were just like the many liberal churches of our day that not only tolerates sin in their midst, but celebrates their diversity and openness to such sins.

Paul said, rather than rejoicing, you should mourn instead (verse 2). He said, "Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (verse 2). Paul then explains how he has dealt with this man.

1 Corinthians 5:3-5

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

You say, "Steve, that doesn't sound very forgiving to me." Well, it's not. The issue here is that there is unrepentant sin in the church. And that can't be! Because, the church is God's people on earth. The church is comprised of those who are following after God. And, when Israel had a theocracy, they were to kill such individuals. But, with the coming of Christ and with the political circumstances surrounding the Roman Empire (much like we have today), the solution to a sinning member of the church is church discipline. It's removing them from your midst.

Because, to keep them in your midst would affect everyone. This is what Paul goes on to say in verse 6.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

A little sin in your camp will spread to all. But, Christ changes all of that. He has been sacrificed to cleanse us. Then, Paul clarifies everything in verse 9.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

So, how do you deal with your homosexual employee at work? How do you deal with your neighbors who are living together, but not married? How do you deal with your pro-choice relative?

Reach out to them. You share Christ with them. You tell them of the story of the story of Jesus, who was crucified for our sins according to the Scriptures; who was raised according to the Scriptures. You show them the joys of following Jesus.

You don't follow their ways of sin. You follow in the ways of the holiness of God. But, you don't shun them. They make no claims upon their lives as being followers of God. They are outside the church. They are outside the camp. They need to know the love that Jesus gives.

If they are interested in Jesus, by all means, let them come and behold our God. Let them hear of the message of forgiveness. Let's call them to repentance.

Now, if they claim they have come to faith in God, but continue in their sin, we cannot have it. Don't associate yourself with sexually immoral people who claim to be Christians. Paul says clearly, ...

1 Corinthians 5:11

[Do not] associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

Keep them out. This is church discipline. This is the equivalent of the death sentences of Leviticus 20. God's people must be pure.

I want to close with a story from a book that Yvonne and I are seeking to edit entitled, "Salvation Stories." Here's the story of a friend of ours.

The story of my life up to this point has been nothing short of amazing. I don't claim to have the best story, but rather, the best God, who is more powerful than Satan's tightest grasp. The youngest of three children, I grew up on a farm until my parents divorced when I was eight years old. I always knew I was different than other boys and had always felt a distance between me and my dad and brother. That distance grew greater when I was molested at six years old. Not having a healthy example of what love looked like between two males—there was no example of that in my home—I was drawn inward to my own thoughts of what love looked like. I was also drawn to other males looking to find their approval, though most of it led to rejection. Being very confused about my identity, I found myself being drawn to physical affection from men.

Even though I grew up attending church and church activities, I never knew that Jesus had come to rescue me from my sinful heart and actions. For years I blamed God for "making me" with same-sex attraction. Around age thirteen, I had all but resigned to these thoughts and behaviors. By the time I was in high school, I had had many encounters with other boys my age, all-the-while feeling guilt and regret for my behavior. My conscience knew it was wrong, but I suppressed it and justified my actions because I didn't know how to be any different. I literally hated myself and did not know how to deal with my feelings or know who to talk to about getting help. For me, drug and alcohol abuse became a way of escaping reality. Church, in my mind, was a place to go to "feel better" about what I had done the previous night or week. Because the church I grew up supported the gay agenda, I never heard about sin, Jesus Christ, or what would happen to those who remain living in these sinful behaviors.

When I was sixteen, I told my mom and stepfather that I was gay, which made them want to "fix" it by sending me to counseling. That same summer, a friend invited me to church with her and, though I rejected the invitation at the time, she had planted a seed that proved to be life-saving. She had an inner confidence and peace that I was in need of. Six months later, I finally accepted that invitation when my own situation had worsened. At her church I heard the gospel for the first time and wanted Jesus to change my life. I was convicted of my sin and desired to read my Bible, pray, and attend youth group.

I was excited that Jesus could help change me, but I felt ashamed share the real me with others. Consequently, I never got too deep with anyone, for fear that they would walk out on me. But I was trying to do all the right things, except turn away from my sin. This was about as effective as putting clean clothes on right over dirty ones.

Repentance finally happened my first semester at a secular college. I was trying to continue living in and justifying my immorality...again. Yet I believed that I'd still go to heaven. I knew all the right words, but my life and my heart were far from Him. Being challenged by some friends in the Christian Club on my college campus—yes, I was trying to have a foot in both worlds—I gave up fighting the battle that I could not win by myself. I finally gave control over to Christ, as I still do every day, asking for His strength and truth to saturate my mind and change my desires.

During the summer after that first year of college, I began attending the church where my mom and stepfather were saved (and are still serving today), and was baptized in front of the whole church. Wanting to live solely for God's glory and feeling led to grow spiritually in the academic context, I transferred to a Christian college. I enrolled in the Church Music and Theology degree program at The Master's College.

Living around other "normal" guys in the dorm environment was invaluable to me. Here, I became more of who God had called me to be, and learned how to interact biblically with men. They showed me through their examples that affection with men could be healthy and non-sexual. Those relationships have been some of the most special to me, to this day. They, along with the caring support of other masculine men from church, supported, loved, and showed me what true manhood looks and acts like. More than that, they accepted me as one of their own. In our sin, we think that others will reject us when they find out who we really are. But by grace, our heavenly Father accepts us, and so do His children.

Since that moment of surrender and after several years of refining, God has given me a wonderful, beautiful wife and two amazing boys. I get to be the husband I always wanted to be, but thought was impossible. I get to be the father I always needed and sought approval from, but who was absent and indifferent. All of this is possible because my Father in heaven loved me and sent his most-loved Son to die for me so that I could know real love and relationship with Him.

God's saving power is greater than man's horrific offense. Of that fact, I am living proof. The sin of immorality and homosexuality is what God used to bring me to Himself, and what He'll use to keep me humble. I am a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21) and desire to share with all those who are stuck in the deceptively ensnaring homosexual world. He can do it. He said so in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 22, 2015 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[2] <http://www.lifenews.com/2013/01/18/55772015-abortion-in-america-since-roe-vs-wade-in-1973/>

[3] <http://www.mckinleyirvin.com/Family-Law-Blog/2012/October/32-Shocking-Divorce-Statistics.aspx>