

Who's In Charge Here?

Former first Lady, Laura Bush, remembers one night when she and the President visited his parents.

"George woke up at 6 a.m. as usual and went downstairs to get a cup of coffee," Laura said. "And he sat down on the sofa with his parents and put his feet up. His mother Barbara said to him, "Put your feet down!" George's dad, the former president, replied, "For goodness' sake, Barbara, he's the President of the United States."

Barbara replied, "I don't care. I don't want his feet on my coffee table."

The president promptly did as he was told, for as Mrs. Bush observes, "Even Presidents have to listen to their mothers." ⁱ

On this Mother's Day, we come now to a segment of our story of the Israelites that is all about authority. Who has it? How do they use it? And what happens if you disrespect it. Let's begin by noticing...

I. God's Remarkable Promise.

Now remember what's just happened – Israel came up to the border of the Land of Promise and, instead of putting their faith in God, they showed Him contempt. They accepted "fear" as their authority rather than "faith." So, God turns them around and sends them back to the wilderness. As they are going, God gives this message to Moses:

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'After you enter the land I am giving you as a home...'" (Num. 15:1, 2)

STOP!!! WAIT!!! What did God just say? "After you enter the land I am giving you as a home..."? Whom is this message directed to? The adults all know one thing: this message is NOT for them. God had told them:

Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb... and Joshua... (Num. 14:30)

So, God is speaking this promise directly to the next generation of Israel. The oldest of this generation are teenagers and they know that they won't be going into the land for forty years, but what do you suppose this message from God did for them? Don't you think it gave them hope? It gave them a positive vision of the future. It gave them the possibility of years of blessing after they endure years of difficulty. God didn't just warn them about what NOT to do. God didn't say, "Now listen to Me, kids! You better obey Me or you're gonna get the same treatment that your parents got." God is not like the wicked Witch of the West:

"I'll get you, my pretty, and your little dog, too!"

No, I think God knew that the next generation saw the disadvantages of disobedience. So now, God focused on hope. He gave them a technicolor vision of what the future could be.

Moms and Dads, are you doing that with your kids? We can't just teach our kids what NOT to do. That's important, but it's not sufficient. Our kids also need

dreams, they need a vision of what could be, they need hope. The Greek word translated hope in the New Testament is the word *elpizo*. It means “To anticipate with confident expectation.” In a number of passages, this same Greek word is also translated by another English word, “trust.” Last week what did we say the older generation lacked which led to their contempt? They lacked trust in God. Our loving God is going to make sure that the Next Generation does not have that problem. By giving them hope, God is helping them to trust. By giving your children a hopeful view of the future, you’re helping them to grow in their trust of God. Moms and Dads, let’s teach our kids all the remarkable promises of our God.

Next, in these chapters, we need to see that God provides...

II. An Enduring Principle.

Beginning in verse 22 of chapter 15, God speaks of the offerings to be given for “unintentional sin.” Glaring by its absence is any mention of an offering for intentional sin. In other words, there IS NO SACRIFICE for intentional sin. What does this mean? Does this mean that if the people committed a sin on purpose that God would never forgive them?

Well, it can’t mean that because there are numerous examples in both the Old and New Testament of people sinning intentionally, proven by the fact that they carefully planned out their sin, and yet they were forgiven. David and his sin against Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, come to mind. That was obviously intentional. So then, what does this mean?

First of all, I’m afraid this underlines the seriousness of sin, something we were reminded of last week. Sin is so nasty, so corrosive that even when we are forgiven, there can be consequences that are not reversible, at least not reversible in this lifetime. Some Christians today have a cavalier attitude toward sin that is simply unwarranted. Have you ever heard a Christian say, “Well, if this is sin, I’ll just ask Jesus to forgive me tomorrow”? How can such an attitude be squared with Heb. 10:26 and 27?

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

“Intentional sin” literally means sinning “with a high hand,” with a fist raised in defiance toward God. It demonstrates an on-going, unrepentant attitude.

Secondly, is the specific penalty that is designated here for “intentional sin.” We find it in Num. 15:30:

But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people.

The term “cut off” means capital punishment; they must die. Now we are at the very center of what many people find so controversial about the Old Testament. First of all, many people today believe no crime is worthy of capital punishment and secondly, they certainly don’t think blasphemy is worthy of capital punishment. So, how can compassionate, grace-filled, New Testament Christians embrace these archaic, judgmental, Old Testament passages?

Let me answer that by asking three questions. First, “From where do we get our definitions of right and wrong?” This is critically important. Does each culture

create its own definitions of right and wrong? If so, then you have no reason to be upset because these are just the rules of another culture. But I don't know anyone who doesn't get upset when they see another culture doing things that violate their definitions of right and wrong. So, apparently definitions of right and wrong really don't come from individual cultures because if they did, we wouldn't get so upset when other cultures "get it wrong."

Instead, perhaps this country's founding fathers were closer to the truth when they wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights..." Where did they get this idea? From God's Word!! Jesus prayed to His Father:

Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth. (John 17:17)

Human rights are not created by a vote of people, they are created by God! If God creates the definitions of what is right and what is wrong, then on what conceivable basis do you dare to call God's actions "wrong?" What does that say about you? It says you believe you are more righteous than God.

Which leads to my second question, which is, "What are God's ultimate intentions for people?" This is important because if His intentions are for me to be His witless slave, then I am not comforted in knowing that He makes the rules. But, BUT, if God's ultimate intentions are for my good, then even if I don't fully understand His rules, I will follow them because I know and trust Him, I know His heart. So, what are God's intentions for us?

II Peter 3:9 He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Jer. 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Is. 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

There are many, many more verses that could be listed but these make His intentions clear – God's ultimate intentions are for us to prosper, to live in hope, to be forgiven of our sins and live forever with Him. Knowing these intentions should remove all doubt about the goodness of His actions.

The third question is this: What do you believe about life? What I mean specifically is, is life on this earth all there is or is there something more? And if there is something more, what is it and how do we get to it?

Many people today think that dying physically is the worst tragedy imaginable. That can be true only if there is no life after death because if there is life after death and if that life is better than this life, then how is dying the worst tragedy? If life after death is living with Jesus in a pain-free paradise, then isn't the worst tragedy NOT being able to go where Jesus is?

So, to these three questions I've given you Biblical answers. If you embrace those three answers (that God defines right and wrong, that God's ultimate intentions for us are for good and that life doesn't end when you die but continues

on in one of two places (either with Jesus or without Him) then, with those in mind we now can go back and examine what God decreed about intentional sin in the Old Testament.

First, God sets the rules and secondly, he sets them based on what is best for us. Third, if our faith is in Him, then, when we die, we will go to live with Him forever in paradise. The enduring principle through all this then is: **loyalty to God will always be rewarded.** “Intentional sin” means sinning with no desire to repent. Why is there no sacrifice for “intentional sin”? Because sin is only forgiven if we humbly repent. “If we deliberately keep on sinning,” it means we never have repented nor do we ever intend to. Christ’s sacrifice is ineffective for only one category of sin – sin that has not been repented of. Your loyalty to God through Christ will always, always be rewarded. Your reward is that Christ will be loyal to you and He will save you from what your sins deserve. This principle will endure forever.

Lastly, we see in this passage...

III. A Dangerous Proposal

In Numbers 16 we see the depth of the cancer of contempt that brought about the crisis at Kadesh Barnea. One of the Levites, the helpers of the Priests, a man named Korah, has rounded up a lynch mob of 250 prominent men of the nation and they come to remove Moses and Aaron from power. Their false accusation is found in verse 3:

They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD’s assembly?” (Num. 16:3)

Now, let’s examine this charge. Did Moses beg God for this assignment? No. Moses tried to get out of it! Aaron got roped into it by his brother Moses. So, the charge of Moses and Aaron “setting themselves above” the people is totally false.

Secondly, is the whole community holy – “set apart for God”? God just condemned the whole assembly for contempt! If it weren’t for Moses begging God, the whole assembly would be dead right now. So, what’s going on here? What’s Korah’s REAL agenda?

Have you ever noticed that when people start drawing up complaints against a leader, there’s usually two agendas? There’s the agenda that is released to the press and there’s the REAL agenda drawn up in the back room. The press release agenda usually says things must be done “for the good of the people.” The back room agenda says things must be done so that “we” (a small clique) can regain power or steal power. This was the case with the Pharisees and their complaints against Jesus, remember? This was also true of Absalom and David, Haman and Esther and Daniel and the satraps of King Darius. Oh yeah, and how about Satan and God? Disrespect of authority is NOT a new game and it takes its cue from Satan.

So, Korah’s real agenda was to wrestle power away from Moses and Aaron and install himself in the seat of power. This raises another critical question, “What is God’s relationship with worldly authority?”

Rom. 1 makes this relationship clear:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. (Rom. 13:1)

But what if the political authority establishes laws that contradict God's law? Are we still to obey them? First of all, we must be very careful how we define which laws contradict God's law. For example, God's Word does not designate a certain tax rate. All that God's Word says is, **"If you owe taxes, pay taxes..."** (Rom. 13:7) But, if a government or other authority in your life directs you to disobey a command of God, you must reply as Peter did to the religious authorities in his life:

...We must obey God rather than men! (Acts 5:29)

For most of us who have grown up in this country, we can't imagine ever having to face that decision here. But, my friends, that day has come. A recent Air Force policy says that proselytizing is now forbidden. To proselytize simply means to "endeavor to cause someone to convert to your beliefs." Jesus says we all should do that in Matt. 28:19. The Air Force says we can't. Who will the Christians obey?

But, let's bring this down closer to home. In fact, let's bring it right into our homes. God has ordained an order of delegated authority in the home. Father is described as the "head" of the family, the leader (Eph. 5:23). Mother is described as one who is to "submit" to the father but also as the person who is "one" with the father. They are a team with Dad as the captain. Children are to "obey" their parents, plural. Children obeying their parents is so important that God made it one of His top ten rules: "Honor your father and your mother." So, parents, when your children say to you, "Why should I have to do what you tell me to do?" It's actually wrong to say, "Because I say so." It's right to say, "so that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God is giving you." (Ex. 20:12)

Parents, you have a holy calling raising your children in this culture. There are a lot of voices out there telling you how to get your child from Egypt to the Land of Promise. Be careful. Don't be deceived by the Korah's who come with strange, new ideas about what the authority structure of the home should look like. Trust God. He created right and wrong. His intentions for you are to bless you and your children. His way will lead your children not just to success but to eternal life. Fight the fight!

Moms, we want especially to honor you today. Your tender hearts have always been your stock in trade but we want you to know we see something else in you as well. We see your iron will. We see your tenacity to never give up on us or give in to us. Though some people say that being a mother is just an "ordinary" job, we know that is so untrue. We close this service with a tribute to you.

[Show video – Mighty 3:26]

When someone asks, "Who's in charge here?" In this country, in this state, in this church, in your family; there's only one right answer – "God's in charge." Let's pray...

ⁱ John McCaslin, *The Washington Times*, "Inside the Beltway," (11-12-03)