

Extracting Morality and Meaning from Scriptural passages July 2022

Reading Deuteronomy 22.

When considering the Law of Moses, it is important to remember that it was designed by God to be a schoolmaster or pedagogue to allow the reader to draw nigh unto Christ. Not only does this mean that the law anticipated and prepared for the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth but also that understanding and immersing oneself in its mindset will allow the reader and hearer to perceive and experience something of the mindset of the Messiah himself. He was totally familiar with its themes and messages having spent his formative years in their consideration, it was his meat and drink, and from whence he extracted spiritual nourishment which allowed his new man to grow and blossom.

In this modern world of apparent relative morality, the starting point with regards to the Word of God is one of dismissal, scepticism and doubt. There is a great contrast to the spirit of this age with those who take a different perspective, and instead seek to align themselves with what God has revealed as He shares His intellect with His children and making that the premise of their approach. Such Bible students look for meaning, they dig for it and they glean what they can, and they refine the material and hone it. This we endeavour to do in this presentation.

Deuteronomy 22 is an interesting passage which deals with the vexed issue of human relationships under the censure of the law of Moses. The latter 18 verses of the chapter cover several aspects of illicit sexual activity. Any society has to have laws and guidance to deter and regulate such behaviour. It is often an unpleasant subject to consider but it does not good to ignore or avoid the seriousness of what is at stake. Let us carefully listen to the Word.

Does the Old Testament enshrine outdated and misogynous views about women? Or does it reflect the timeless eternal principles of righteousness but through the lens of a hard-hearted and stiff-necked people? This can be answered by asking does God know what He is doing, and by asking ourselves the question did He plan things out thoroughly before He set everything in motion? Who seeks to educate God or correct Him, no one surely as he is inerrant! So why is it that many portray themselves in this way? Judging things by modern warped standards is no way to approach such important matters!

There are five main sections we shall examine, some of which are very briefly mentioned.

Verses 12-21 deals with the circumstance of a hateful husband.

Verses 22 deals with adultery on the part of a married woman

Verses 23-27 deals with a betrothed virgin in both an urban and a rural setting

Verse 28-29 deals with an unbetrothed virgin

Verse 30 deals with nudity and the taboo of parental exposure.

Taking these in order it is necessary to not only read what is said in context but to be aware of the way these subjects are treated elsewhere in the Holy Scriptures to ensure that any consideration is as circumspect as possible. Reading the Old Testament to find flaws is not acceptable to a disciple of Jesus. He loved the law and it was his study "all

the day". A scholar may seek to dispassionately pass comment from an academic point of view, but the scholars' primary purpose is not to establish an active tool for morality but rather to establish the validity among their peers of their own conceptions. Not wishing to be anything other than faithful doers, we should read the Law in faith with the goal of being able to draw workable tools to employ in our daily lives so that our morality can be better matched to the ideal standards with God in His wisdom impose for the regulation of mankind.

The Law was not kept by wider Israelitish society. Only one man was able to keep every commandment and that was Jesus Christ. This does not lessen its value but rather demonstrates that no Law was capable of reforming humanity, nor did God try to do so through the Law. Its primary purpose was to make sin exceedingly sinful, so that we are without excuse.

A Hateful husband

Some men just hate their wives. There may in some cases possibly be good cause for this at times but hating someone you have individually chosen to partner with for the extent of your natural life is an immediate failure on the man's part. There is no time reference given. It does not say if the hatred sprang up quickly or if it grew over time before coming to a crisis. However, the idea that a man would after decades of accepting a wife as his life partner, then accuse her of pre-marital infidelity and then expected to be treated with respect himself is a difficult ask. Why would society permit any man to honourably and correctly challenge the purity of his virgin after a long delay? It is therefore inferred but not stated that this challenge is made soon after the couple have sexual relations.

Are both parties treated equally in this matter? Can the woman challenge the man about his prior sexual activity? Is it possible to establish his virginity in the same way as it is possible with a woman? The physical set up of the reproductive organs prevents this. God has designed it that way. That the woman's hymen is a testament to her sexual purity is not an accident, God does nothing without reason. What reason then can there be for this to be so one sided? The scriptures are not misogynous they just deal with reality.

The paternity of any child is unclear to us, until recently when DNA tests have reduced the uncertainty of fatherhood to a minuscule margin of error, the only way to ensure that the husband of the woman was the father of her child was to ensure her marital faithfulness. Joseph was certain (but wrong) that Mary must have had sexual relations with another man as he knew that he had waited but that she was pregnant. Scientifically he was correct but science cannot provide the answers in many circumstances and needs to be employed carefully. In this modern world, perhaps there would have been pressure for Jesus to be aborted as an inconvenience to the upwardly mobile young couple, how horrible! It beggars the thought to see such an approach taken so often today by those with no regard to the sanctity of life. He knew that the child she had conceived was not his.

A woman having sexually activity with many male partners would have prevented any of them for knowing whose father any child produced by her was. God did not want that. He had insisted that it was one man and one woman in marriage, an unnatural arrangement procured for the benefit of the godly seed He wished to raise. Some animals mate with one partner for life but that is not common and the tendency within humans is not to be sexually attracted to only one person of the opposite sex. Monogamy is unnatural if the only deliberation is basic animal instincts. The way God designed things ensured that the man could provide for his family whilst the woman put the majority of her effects into raising the vulnerable children. Before formula and thermometers, it was not possible for a man to provide milk for the new-born, the woman had to do it.

Having to consider the physical constitution in any analysis is not new. Romans 1v20 highlights that the underlying “invisible” principles of deity are enshrined within the physical universe. *“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse”*. These physical principles should never eclipse explicit scriptural teaching but if properly appreciated should complement and enhance our understanding of any subject on a deeper level.

The man then has a right to know that any child produced by his wife is his and that he is therefore fully responsible for that new life, without compromise. He also needs to know that the woman is as fully committed to their relationship as he is. Raising the sleight of her pre-marital infidelity publicly is a hateful thing but was permitted under the law by a man who felt that he must do so. If the woman was not as fully committed to the relationship as he was, he needed to know for the sake of pursuing a godly seed. Hating the garment spotted by the flesh is better than hating a worldly person themselves but let us be in no doubt that God hates worldly people and that we were once such people ourselves so worthy of that hate!

What did this challenge to her position involve? First it involved the parents of his wife. Any issue regarding the integrity of their daughter was to be answered by the provision of facts. Her virginity was to be proven by the production of evidence. This evidence was only decisive if it was dependable and reliable. Both her father and her mother are expressly involved in the presenting of the evidence. Anyone could produce a bloody rag but establishing that this proved the innocence of their daughter was a matter of protocol and registration with witnesses. No doubt a whole system of best practise was built up over time. Making the issue of the virtue of a young woman a contestable matter seems harsh but the stark reality of the seriousness of what was involved permitted no casual approach, her very life may depend upon it. If the evidence of the cloth could not be produced, she was to be stoned by the congregation as a fornicating whore. The moral abhorrence to such loose behaviour of former times has been replaced today with “live and let live” which basically seems to mean do what you want when you want to do it and do not consider the consequences!

The rescuers of the unfairly maligned are family and a fair society. Today we do not have a particularly fair society so it must be to family that we fall back on in times of crisis. Not abandoning the impetuous young to their own fate, cooperation should be sought between the generations to ensure protection and probity over such sensitive matters. Do the young have all the answers? Clearly in this context their do not! Let them listen

more to their elders who may have more understanding in such matters than they are given credit for.

Whilst there should be no hateful husbands among those convinced by the truth, and any thorny matters between husband and wife should be dealt with in the privacy of the matrimonial home away from the ears of others, the basic issue of the virtue of both our Sunday school scholars and therefore also our young brethren and sisters should be above reproof. Human weakness means that there is more pressure to conform to another standard but let us not deceive ourselves as to the high standards we should apply to ourselves and expect in others, who wish to please Christ. Fornication will all too easily rear its ugly head if we are not on our personal guard in such sensitive matters.

A usual principle of the Law of Moses is that an accuser will receive the punishment of any sin/crime which was falsely levelled upon another, see Deuteronomy 19v16-21. *"Then ye shall do unto him as he had thought to have done unto his brother"*. Why did the hateful husband escape stoning if his accusations were proven to be false? Instead of being stoned, as a guilty wife would have been, he was to pay a fine of 100 shekels of silver and the offended father was financially recompensed. This was double the later financial obligation as there is potentially more moral repugnance in this initial case.

Once her innocence has been publicly established, he may never put her away, she must remain his wife and separation and divorce are both denied to him, unlike in some other cases. He paid for his mistake with his future life, a woman he hated was to remain tied to him during the rest of his days without remission, and it would be a matter of public knowledge that he has maligned her and that her innocence had been established, his reputation as an unpleasant character would seem to be part of the punishment he must bear. Are these equal to the actual loss of life of the woman, on the basis of an eye for an eye? God is a person of equity whom we should implicitly trust in all affairs, and we should seek to understand not resort to criticism which demonstrates our naivety in such complex matters not our wisdom.

The issue revolves around the production of evidence. A young man who cheaply spent his virginity had no recourse to any physical tracking of his misdemeanours, his sin. Society could not punish him as they could a woman, but God would know, and of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who was so hypocritical about such an important matter? The lack of ability to be held accountable by Israelitish society should not embolden men to be sly and deceitful because they could not be found out so easily perhaps but rather should cause them to reflect the seriousness of something that is private and hidden from public view now but will one day be exposed!

What was not permitted in the society of Israel under the law of Moses was for a continual assault of verbiage to be tolerated. Either the husband was to advance his accusations, or he was to shut up and leave the matter well alone. There was no allowance for an ongoing harping of nasty insults. The matter would come before the elders, the reputation of a virgin in Israel was a weighty matter and was not left in any limbo of uncertainty. The Law protected her in this way from ongoing slander and innuendo.

A husband who did not hate his wife might like Joseph in Matthew 1v19 seek to put her away privily, not willing to make her a public example although they were not yet married

only espoused at that point. They did not marry until after baby Jesus was born, Luke 2v5. Forcing a public examination was not a requirement of the Law else Joseph would have had to do so in Mary's case.

Female Adultery

That men are capable of adultery is clear. The occasions recorded in the Bible of adultery focus on the dual aspect of the sin. Both parties are to be condemned as this verse states unequivocally. In the gospel of John, the woman taken in adultery was arraigned alone before Jesus by her accusers! Where was the man (caught in the very act)? This partitive approach is wrong, both were intimately involved, both should have been arraigned to face judgment. Perhaps he was a Roman and out with their jurisdiction, but if so, he was not outside the censure of the Spirit. Was there fear of Roman censure more than their respective for God's truth?

Why then the framing here of a woman married rather than a man married? The context of the law of Moses provides the permission of a man to have more than one wife, but never for a woman to have more than one husband at any time. The only way this be deemed fair and not imbalanced between the sexes is to look at the status of the parental responsibility towards the child. A stepfather is not emotionally bound to the child in the same way as to his own kin. Equality of behaviour and lack of favouritism is to be sought after in a God-fearing parent, but it is not the same thing as the natural ties of physical parenthood which come more instinctively. A natural parent may refuse to acknowledge their progeny but that is to their eternal shame and a failure of the deepest personal responsibility to a vulnerable life who is incapable of survival initially without intimate support.

Divorce and remarriage as well as polygamy were permitted under the Law of Moses because of the hardness of Israel's heart Matthew 19v8, Mark 10v5, but from the beginning it was not so. God through His prophet Moses gave them permission to go beyond the Edenic standards in a fallen society, however spiritual in other matters that law was.

The propagation in hope of the **woman's seed** within that Holy nation superseded other considerations at that time. The woman was to bear the only begotten, the man was **not** to sire him. With honour comes responsibility. A man may have many wives with the purpose of raising up faithful seed, the woman was always to devote herself to that seed which she alone had mothered. Those who go against nature to take on the responsibility another had left through desertion or inability (mothers do die in childbirth and at other times) are therefore to be additionally praised. Isaiah 54 which treats on the barren being themselves mothers and honoured by God is interesting to read in this context.

That there is no avoidance of the death sentence in some circumstance is instructive. The pair were found. The implication is that they wished to be concealed. Their sinful action was done out of sight but discovered by others. If she was raped there is no stated defence but if she had been raped, then would she not be subsequently ashamed that she had been in a position where this was possible? A rapist is always guilty of his sin but a woman who has taken additional steps to avoid this possibility is to be protected. God can more easily protect us if we take steps to limit our own foolishness, think of Dinah!

“If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband”. The emphasis in this passage is on the initiator of the actual sexual activity, always the man, who must physically take the lead part in the activity. (Remember Joseph ran away from unwanted sexual advances.) The woman may go along with it and if she does, she is also guilty. A rapist is unlikely to be as successful in a society which sanctifies its virgins and married women. In such a society a married woman would not travel alone, especially in a strange area, perhaps another reason for the proliferation of hand servants and chaperones in former times? Should such behaviour be needed? Sadly, it is necessary to teach our children to be cautious of the sexual appetites of the undisciplined and immoral, and the basic steps of communal responsibility which can avert such depravity. In a different world it could be otherwise, but we live in a corruption fallen state at present which only the return of Christ will change. The saving of sexual virtue until marriage is not well regarded today and is deemed to be a restrictive of personal choice but choosing to put God’s high ideals first used to be acceptable to a majority of young people sadly this is no longer so prevalent but should be so amongst members of the One Body of Christ.

A betrothed virgin

Any so espoused were in one sense regarded as husband and wife although they had yet to be legally married, they had yet to become recognised as married partners by entering into that binding promise before witnesses. The language used *“a damsel, a virgin be betrothed”* *“humbled his neighbour’s wife”* carries a certain similarity but it is not equivalent. Remember wife is a translation from *“his woman”*, not his as a possession but his as an exclusion to others. Esther is described as a maiden, translated from the same Hebrew word as damsel, a young woman, as was Naaman’s Israelitish maid in 2 Kings 5v2. Innocence and maybe even naivety may be implied by such a term, someone inexperienced in the ways of the wider world! She was a virgin and unmarried, there had been no physical union. Only in the sense of anticipation was she *“a man’s woman”*, she was promised to him, but not yet his, just as he was not yet hers. There is no one sided ownership in Biblical marriage only exclusivity in the terms, his woman and her man.

In a city a man may find this virgin and lie with her. The sentence against both was extreme, both were to die. The reason given for the damsel’s sentence was because she cried not, being in the city. If she resisted his advances, if she refused to comply then she would have escaped the censure of the Law. Her silence was complicit. This is something we should teach our young people. Bad things happen but we cannot remain silence in the face of adversity. We should speak out against what is taking place and offer resistance to evil in such a form. This is definitely not one of those occasions when you should not resist evil but let it have its sway. Resisting not evil does not mean that our children are open to being raped, but no one knows how they will react in such dire circumstances and we pray God that are all protected from such a calamity. That Dinah was taken advantage of by Shechem did not mean that God was cursing Jacob’s family but rather that the family acted foolishly on several levels but was all ultimately overruled by God, see Genesis 34.

Leaving young people in ignorance of the ways of the world does no good in these circumstances. An ignorant young woman could be taken advantage of by an

unscrupulous man who relies on her naivety to fulfil his evil desires. Our daughters need to know that they can and must say no, and that such a no should be actioned upon by her suitor. It is not the case that a woman must do everything a man says because he is a man, and she is a woman. This is not what Godly subservience means. To this evil man it should be a no, to her husband it should be not now, please wait.

To not speak out against her attacker was unacceptable. Putting yourself into circumstances in a city, where it was not possible to be heard by others in such a dire situation was foolish. In the absence of a chaperone who could offer assistance or raise the alarm, a young virgin on her own should avoid certain areas like the traps they could become. This is not paranoia but common sense. To teach our young woman to be casual about such matters is to cheapen the very issue of her virtue, her virginity. A precious aspect of her self-respect and worth as a young woman in Israel.

It should be borne in mind that any when visiting others on their own should give regard to how such a visit appears. Amongst the community of saints there should be no appearance of evil. Accordingly, when anyone visits the home of a vulnerable person, they should not act alone, but ensure that there is a chaperone so that all things can be done decently and in order. Failure to approach such circumstances with sufficient sensitivity can backfire and misplaced motives can be attributed by the adversary which must be avoided. Sadly, it has been proven by bitter experience by some, that accusations can be made, and society does not require the "*mouth of two or three witnesses*" but will side with the vulnerable person who therefore has significant power for malicious harm. Accordingly, when visiting such a person it is important that an additional witness should always be on hand to ensure propriety in such matters.

The only time that Jesus was recorded as being alone with a woman in a private place was after his resurrection when he was confronted by Mary at the tomb, John 20v14-18. Even here Jesus asked her to "*touch me not for I am not yet ascended to my father*" showing amongst other things his propriety in such circumstances. However, no critic would accuse him of inappropriate behaviour because no critic would admit that he had come back from the dead! The Samaritan woman at the well does not count in this context because although their conversation was private, they were in a public place, you cannot get a more public place than a well! No doubt many people were on the fringe and certainly within eyeshot if not within hearing range. In the majority of cases when Jesus was with women, he was amongst womEn, plural not singular. He knew that many wished to convict him of sin, he gave them no such opportunity.

Jesus was tempted in all points like and we and yet without sin. Jesus will judge people on matters involving fornication, adultery and sexuality, he knows what he is taking about, he has an appreciation of the temptations and trials in such dimensions and rose above it because his desire for righteousness eclipsed all else. He is a fitting judge who is sympathetic with the human condition which he "*kept under*". God was very real to him and was always in his day-to-day life as seen by the decisions which he continually took for the glory and honour of the Father.

The man her assailant was also to die. He had humbled his neighbour's wife. He knew that she was betrothed. Betrothal was a public thing. It was not the romantic musing of two star spangled lovers, but the open commitment to the future marriage of two young

people in Israel who were not yet lovers but wanted to be so. Would you want someone else to do that to your loved one, your promised bride to be? Loving your neighbour as yourself, if honoured would always prevent such foolishness, such sin.

To humble a woman is to afflict her. This is always something negative. Having sex with a woman is not humbling her if within the marriage vows there is consent, but a husband can selfishly afflict his wife if he acts without due care and attention to her wishes and her desires. Let us not confuse headship with wisdom. A man can be the head of his head and act without wisdom and require his wife to submit by intimidating her, but whilst she does not have to cry out as in the city to avoid being raped, she can question her husband and has every right to do so. If something cannot be done to the glory of God, it cannot be done acceptably and should be avoided. A betrothed couple are respecting what the Apostle Paul said under inspiration in 1 Corinthians 7v1-5.

Fornication is the wrong stirring of a powerful force and marriage is the divinely provided channel where sexuality can be enjoyed. The advice of the Apostle is permission not commandment. Some, not many, are eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God, Matthew 19v10-12. Everything affecting the saints is overruled by God including this.

In the country things were different. A woman out and about and taken by surprise was not condemned to death as the woman humbled in the city was. It is more likely that a woman might be alone outside far from the madding crowd in the verdant fields of the promised land. She should fear no wild beasts in the cultivated fields under God's blessing but sadly men behaving unrestrained towards the opposite sex even as animals, were to be harshly judged for their vile crimes. A woman spoken for, was promised to another. This must always be respected. A man unconcerned about the bond of the tongue was indeed a raging fire and would bring damage to all those around him! If a faithful virgin cried out when so taken, then she would not be heard, but cry out she must. She must make it clear to her assailant that his advances were unwelcome and rejected, he had to force her because as far as it was humanly possible, she would not participate in this sin.

The law in this chapter is plain. The issue of rape is similar to murder. *"For as when a man rises against his neighbour and slays him, even so is this matter"*. The Bible raises such matters to the highest level. If the penalty for this had remain as strong would the problems of sexual liberalisation and all its attendant issues have been so severe? What of teenage pregnancy, abortion, casual divorce and remarriage. The Bible protects women by the severity of the sentence in such matters.

What then of a young couple so foolish as to have sex before marriage? This chapter deals with this issue. *"If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed and lay hold on her and lie with her, and they be found; then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he has humbled her, he may not put he away all his days"*. What can we learn from this? Is this a formula to find a bride for those unable to court a woman? Does this mean that a virgin can be bought with money? What if they are not found after engaging in such illicit activity, is the virgin forever tainted by her folly if they go their separate ways? There are always consequences to any action. Often these consequences are unseen, but the way that meaning is extracted from such passages should remind us to pause and reflect and dig deep in our analysis of other subjects before we rush in without thinking through any

matter. The man might seek to escape his shameful folly but could the woman? Remember the penalty for not being a virgin bride in that earlier section!

To “find” a damsel suggests that the man was looking. It is not wrong to look for a partner. Indeed, when Jesus addressed the issue of looking on a woman to lust after her, Matthew 5v28, he is careful to use the term adultery not fornication, because sexual attraction is not wrong. We should confuse such with sin itself. What is wrong is for sexual attraction to be inappropriate when someone is already committed to another, and hence involving adultery rather than fornication. This must be avoided to avoid sin. In the backdrop of acceptable polygamy even if the man is already married to sexually desire another woman is not adultery. Under the Law then the woman should be regarded as out of bounds because she is herself married to another. Hence so-called “secret marriages” are dangerous misnomers, as no one can be sure whether such a person is still available as a potential partner. In a similar way Jesus attributes that a woman put away by her husband, as being “*caused to commit adultery*”, Matthew 5v32. Others may desire her but as she is actually still married such is adultery as he earlier defined it. An innocent wrongly put away need not run to another man to find a new partner but can still be caused to commit adultery by her newfound but erroneous status as someone who is not actually free from her marriage life bond, even though many will wrongly regard her as such.

To “lay hold” is to catch, capture or keep hold. Can this be done in the sense of enrapture or beguile rather than using physical force? It seems not. It is used in Deuteronomy 21v19 in the sense of to forcibly restrain, as it also is in 1 Kings 13v4. There is no clear alternative passage where this is anything other than domination. The young man has been forceful, but the crime of passion is not punished with death! The difference here is that the young woman was not committed to another man. Unchaperoned this was much more preventable so the key lesson here, seems to be that the fate of our youth is in the hands of the wise, who knowing the strength of feeling that can irrationally be aroused, ensure that the interactions of the young are regulated with these impulses in mind. How rarely would this happen if all parties took steps to circumvent it rather than to pretend that it will not be possible and that we have a freedom to merely please ourselves and act casually which we do not. This is dangerous propaganda perpetrated by those with another agenda than the glory of God who would take our children from us, in mind if not in body.

Sex outside of marriage is never condoned in the scriptures and here the binding nature of the sentence that having been so impulsive, the man can never put away this damsel he has humbled is informative. They are to remain together for life. Unlike other issues where lack of favour and uncleanness excuse the hardheartedness of the male towards his wife in putting her away, Deuteronomy 24v1-4. We cannot replicate this today as sadly the very wide lowering of moral standards means that young people of the world often have multiple partners not staying with such in a “relationship” with any degree of responsibility. The responsibility toward another is impressed here. Sex should never be approached casually, there are always consequences, and as we see here some are lifelong in their effects! This should give pause for thought by those anxious to please God.

The main example of where this behaviour occurred in scripture is in 2 Samuel 13v1-20 where Amnon became infatuated with his sister (presumably adopted or a stepsister) Tamar. She proposed that Amnon ask their father King David, for permission to marry her, which was not possible if there was a blood relationship between them, *“but being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her”*. If she had been promised to another then they both would have had to die, Amnon because he had taken another man’s woman, and she because she had not cried out but being in the city. He had deceived her in pretending to be ill and requesting her attendance in his sickbed, but his sick escapade did end with his death at the hands of a vengeful brother Absalom.

Legally there was little that David could do as this charade had been engineered by cunning guile. The Law of Moses did not cover ever eventually that it is possible to imagine, and an evil heart will pick at something to expose any possible weakness. It seems that his hands were also tied because Tamar had refused to cry out, which was the expected response to someone confronted with such a horrific experience. Caught off-guard in a vulnerable circumstance, perhaps the daughter of Maacah the daughter of the King of Geshur was not educated in the requirements of the Law of Moses as well as others and did not realise her responsibilities. Protected within the confines of the royal palaces she had been lulled into a false sense of security. Villains can be found everywhere. High status does not prevent immoral behaviour.

Dinah is another example of this and her desire to visit the daughters of the land backfired miserably for her, Genesis 34v1. The situation exploded in unknown directions, and it seems she was chastened by this sad experience. That he *“loved her and spake kindly to her”* did not save him for the consequences of his thoughtlessness.

In the New Testament there is not a resetting of the moral compass on morality and sexual conduct. Jesus no doubt absolutely honoured all aspects of the teaching of the Law of Moses as he fulfilled it in every degree, including the issues we have flagged from this passage. When his disciples considered the aspects of how much the Law of Moses applied to gentile believers it is informative to note that general fornication is included in the short list of relevant issues. Acts 15v19,20 & 28,29. Unless we have evidence to the contrary then gentile believers should adopt the default position of the Law regarding matters that affect fornication and sexual morality.

The issue of nudity is also dealt with here. *“A man shall not take his father’s wife nor uncover his father’s skirt.”* Incest is dealt with in some detail in Leviticus 18 where the various degrees of prohibitive closeness are defined. How craven a father who parades himself in front of other members of his family without due regard, showing a lack of respect for them and a lack of respect for God’s principles. That we are all made without fur or feathers is no excuse for wanton nakedness!

Uncovering the skirt refers to the probity and respect that should be shown in such matters. Nudity is not some casual subject that is relegated to custom or choice but a deeply ingrain part of our negative psyche which goes right back to the effects of sin in the garden of Eden, Genesis 3v7. Exodus 32v25 records how Aaron *“had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies”* when the nation sinned over the matter of the golden calf. The matter of nakedness is restricted regarding close family as it is

inopportune to be blatant about such intensely personal matters especially before loved ones, there is a need to be sober in all aspects of living which includes how we dress.

The New Testament requires female believers to “*adorn themselves in modest apparel*” 1 Timothy 2v9. Why are the sisters singled out here? Is it not because the way women can dress is more open to enticement and provocation than a man, in using her sexuality to attract in a cheap and inappropriate way? In 1 Peter 3v3 this direction is repeated in the context of the Sisters particularly of wives, those already committed to a single man as their husband, “*Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel*”. The message still resonates today that the dressing up of the female particularly is to be toned down in all aspects that of hair dos, jewellery as well as clothing. It should be noted that none are banned in totality or else they must wear no apparel! This is no misogyny, but reality men are easily effected by what they see, women less so.

Who decides what is modest dress? Is it the individual themselves who can say, leave it to me I will dress how I regard modesty, or is there an acceptance of all that the wider body of the spiritual community can provide by way of appropriate input as to what modesty comprises as “*in the multitude of counsellors there is safety*”?

It is not a question of dressing unsexually, that is a believer should obviously dress as either the brother they are, or the sister that they are, unisex dressing is not appropriate for the saints. Thus, attempts by some societies to eradicate the difference between male and female in dress are ungodly and counter to the very essence of creation that we are made male and female from the beginning state, when everything was very good. However, they should not dress to sexually entice or excite but be modest in such matters. A chief way of differentiation between the sexes in Biblical terms is that of the hair and the head covering. See 1 Corinthians 11v4-7 13-15, but that is another full subject in its own right. What is important to be clear in this context is that there is a demarcation between men and women, brethren and sisters in both the aspect of head coverings, covered or not covered and also in the hair itself, long versus shorn or shaven.

The Law teaches explicitly that it is wrong to dress up as the opposite sex. In this very chapter, Deuteronomy 22v5 gives this restriction for both a man dressing as a woman and a woman dressing for a man. There is no exception for amusement. The idea we sadly see today of drag queens being educational for children, is morally repugnant and we should not lower our standards for a laugh or because we want to be “funny”. Such funny behaviour will make us funny people, rather than the people who seek to adhere to God’s standards. Compromise on this front lowers the divinely set boundaries in such basic behaviours. This should not be the way that those keen to imitate Christ pursue their newfound freedom. Freedom not to please themselves but freedom to serve God.

However, it would be wrong to set out a list of does and don’ts as the commandments of men in some sort of official capacity. If God has not explicitly given us the details, we must always be aware that our interpretation is up for debate as these thoughts most certainly are. If brethren and sisters cannot have a conversation about such things and reach a consensus suitable for their own members of each Ecclesia, then we are the poorer because of it.

In the presence of God do we not need a covering? Who wishes to appear naked before the judge so that others can see our shame? Revelation 16v15. When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he “*girt his fishers coat on him for he was naked*”, John 21v7. He then jumped into the sea not wanting to wait for the ship to beach. He wanted to hurry but was not prepared to compromise all for speed, there was to be not lack of attire, neither should we act without due care. Antitypically we all need to be suitable clothed. Clothed in the garment provided by the lamb. Will we be acceptable merely wearing what we want rather than taking on board an outside view?

The standards of God are there to be understood and copied on many different levels within the scriptures of Truth. No subject of importance is left unconsidered in the Word and if there is a degree of implicit investigation required, it means that the subject needs to be treated with greater sensitivity and respect for alternative views than a more plain explicit “*thou shalt not*”!

A Voice from the Altar

Russel Noonan