

Sermon for Saturday: Flee From Sexual Immorality

First Fruits Ministries

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Torah Portion This Week: Torah Portion this week: Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19; Isaiah 54:1-10; Matthew 24:29-42; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5: <https://tinyurl.com/3k2hjfp>



Shabbat shalom brothers and sisters. “Of what can any living man or woman complain in view of his or her sins? Let’s examine and search out our ways, and let’s return to the Lord.” This is a verse from Lamentations 3:39-40 that stuck out to me in my personal reading from yesterday, and I thought it would be appropriate to start us off today, because each one of us ought to bring ourselves with humble and contrite hearts before the Lord’s altar when we seek His shalom on this most holy day. We ought to come without a single complaint on our lips. Even in the midst of the pain of sin, of rejection, of loss, of depression, of self doubt, of anger, or of bitterness, we ought to ask ourselves: How can we complain about anything when we truly believe that our God has come in the flesh and sacrificed Himself so we can be free from the bondage of sin and the punishment of eternal darkness? He has promised eternal life and light if we simply trust in Him and follow after Him in all of His ways, and just the tiniest ray of light overcomes the darkness. Instead of complain, we ought to say, as we read in the preceding verses from Lamentations 3:22-29: “The Lord’s acts of mercy indeed do not end, for His compassions do not fail. They are new every morning; great is [His] faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion ... therefore I wait for Him.’ The Lord is good to those who await Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that [a man] waits silently for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep quiet since God has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust; perhaps there is hope.” Our complaining mouths ought to keep

silent; our distressed souls ought to be quieted; our doubting lips ought to be covered in dust and ashes, an idiom for repentance, for we ought to return to the Lord each and every day.

Our God has given us a light and easy yoke to bear whether we are young or old, and even when we are at the lowest place our fleshly imagination might take us, we ought to rejoice because Yeshua has promised us salvation through His sacrifice on the cross. He has triumphed over death, granting us freedom in His victory. He rose and returned to His glory, empowering us as kingdom builders and disciple makers when we very simply submit to Him and trust in His plan. Even when we don't see the big picture, His return and His eternal Kingdom of light remain on the horizon for us if we simply say "yes"—and really mean it. How could we not sit silently in awe, ever thankful, always hoping in Him alone, praising His name that He would even consider saving us and using us for His purposes? And He does use us for His purposes, whether we are the givers or receivers of grace, whether the givers or receivers of love, whether the givers or receivers of truth, and we ought to be grateful for it all. In all these things He is glorified.

Yeshua is the God who created the Heavens and the Earth and everything in them. He doesn't need us to be a part of His plan. He could make a perfect person to replace us with a single thought, and yet He still came for us and He still calls for us each day to come to Him because His glory shines brighter in His act that redeems us from darkness. He seeks to use us for His purposes so His glory can shine through us—because He is our God who overcomes darkness—and so we ought to trust Him and follow Him because of the grace He has offered to us, yes, but also because "He knows the end from the beginning" and "will use all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purposes."

As we contemplate these things, I think it's critical to humble ourselves with the understanding that God's punishment for sin is death, and "a person shall be put to death for his own sin," we read in Deuteronomy 24:16. Likewise, "the soul who sins is the one who will die," we read in Ezekiel 18:4. This is not good news for us, because we also know that we have all sinned; meaning that each one of us is worthy of death. "Surely there is no righteous man on earth who does good and never sins," we read in Ecclesiastes 7:20. These are the types of verses that give people the impression that the law is harsh or that the law no longer applies, particularly when we know that we are saved by the grace of Messiah Yeshua, but both of these ideas about the law could not be further from the truth. "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked

every day,” we read in Psalm 7:11. God forbid we live in wickedness. Furthermore, “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether,” we read in Psalm 19:9. And additionally, we read, “The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever” in Psalm 119:160. According to the Word of God, the law is just—it is not harsh—and it applies forever. It will NEVER be done away with. We know the Lord has repeated this truth also in Matthew 5:17, where we read, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” He also warned in Matthew 7:21-23 that “Many” who say “Lord, Lord”—these are Christians—many will be condemned to outer darkness on account of the fact that they “practice lawlessness.” They sin without repentance.

But God does not desire darkness for us; He desires that we “turn, and live” (Ezekiel 18:32) and accept His sacrifice on our behalf so that we might live, but also that we follow His Torah, which means instruction, because we love Him (Matthew 14:15). It is “a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.” This is relevant because not only do we know that the sacrifice of bulls and goats on Yom Kippur could never take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), and each year this ceremony had to be repeated for temporary atonement, but we also know that this practice no longer occurs and conceivably leaves the whole world accountable for sin and without hope. Is this why so many unbelievers turn to sin that builds upon sin, leaving me and so many other believers aghast at the horrors going on around us? I think it is among the reasons for sin, for how could one sin in the presence and fear of Almighty God! We are called to faith and obedience, and so many of the prophets have exhorted us to endure in both trust and faithfulness, because this testimony of two leads to life. The end of the Temple sacrificial system through the one-time sacrifice of Yeshua on the cross was by God’s design all along, for He never desired the world to be without hope. He came in the flesh to provide “a better way” for all who would call upon His name.

When God took accountability for His creation and died as one of us—when He came to die for us as an accursed man—He showed His eternal love for us by becoming the one-time offering for our sin (Hebrews 10:10). We read in Deuteronomy 21:23, “he who is hanged is accursed of God,” and our Lord Yeshua was hung on a tree as a blameless man (2 Corinthians 5:21) so that He could pay for the curse we have brought upon ourselves. We read this verse’s interpretation in Galatians 3:13, “Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’” Because of what He has done for us, when we put our trust in Him, even though “the wages of sin is death,” we can

receive "the gift of God," which "is eternal life in Messiah Yeshua our Lord." This grace afforded to us is a precious gift that we don't deserve. It is something we ought to rejoice in, something that gives life to anyone who accepts it.

And this last point is perhaps the most important of all, for our hearts must remain humble and contrite. He also called us to "go and sin no more." God's grace through Messiah Yeshua doesn't give us license to sin; rather it gives us liberty to walk in righteousness. The Apostle Paul clarifies this point in Galatians 2:17, where we read, "if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!" We cannot "turn the grace of God into lewdness," but rather we must turn toward the Lord and follow Him by saying and doing everything that He said and did. The path into God's Kingdom is ready for us—it is finished—it was paved with solid gold by our Lord when He walked in the flesh until He rose from the dead and ascended onto His Heavenly throne, but if we want the promise of salvation that He has offered to each of us, we have to walk on that narrow path with His Spirit leading us all the way. Have hope, even in the midst of darkness, for when we return to the Lord and seek Him with all of our hearts, we can rest assured that "The Lord's acts of mercy indeed do not end" and "His compassions do not fail. They are new every morning." Great is His faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Today I want to hone in on some verses that have been weighing on my mind since we read them in past days, and the Lord has reminded me how I may have glossed over them with too little analysis. In light of several events that have given us cause to complain relative to sexual immorality in our community and beyond, I think it's appropriate to focus in on these verses now, for the Lord calls us to seek Him with all of our hearts and we can only do that if we take the time to understand some of His more uncomfortable lessons for us. Let me start with this, because it ties in the message that I've preached to you so far. In Acts 15:19-21, the Apostle James, really Yaakov, makes a judgment on how the Jewish-born disciples of Yeshua ought to welcome gentile believers into Israel through faith in our Messiah. We read, "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

There's only two things I want to mention here today, because I've taught on this passage many times before. First of all, new believers in Yeshua from among the

Gentiles were called to immediately abstain from sexual immorality as a condition of being welcomed into the faith, as well as three other things. That doesn't mean that people engaged in such practices couldn't be saved by the grace of God; just that Gentiles were called to immediately stop practicing sexual immorality upon their conversion through faith. The English "sexual immorality" comes from the Greek word porneía (πορνεία), which means generally "fornication" or "whoredom," according to Strong's Concordance 4202. The HELPS Word-studies, which was originally published in The Discovery Bible, looks to the general usage of words during the time of the Bible's authorship, and this source gives us a better understanding of Biblical Greek words than the limited form that some translators attempt to give. In the case of porneía, "sexual immorality" is a good translation because the word was used rather broadly. According to HELPS Word studies, porneía means "a selling off (surrendering) of sexual purity," or in other words "promiscuity of any [or] (every) type." It is the root word for the English "pornography" or "pornographic," and certainly watching filth like this would fall into the definition of sexual immorality, but the word is far broader than this. That being said, without some kind of instruction from God, it's really impossible to know what Luke meant when he used the word in his account of the judgment coming from the Apostle here, and anyone who attempts to define it from the Greek alone is missing the big picture.

The last verse in the passage I've quoted comes into play to help us fill in the gaps. We read: "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." This is a powerful little verse, for not only does it explain that gentile Christians would be in the synagogues every Sabbath as they follow after Yeshua, it also indicates that these same gentiles would hear the law of Moses preached each week in those synagogues on the Sabbath. From the context of other verses in Scripture, a few that we've already covered, it's clear that the Apostle is making an obvious statement that when gentile Christians hear the instruction of God given to Moses in the Torah, they would be convicted by it and the Holy Spirit would lead them to follow it, not out of obligation, but out of love for Yeshua. Over time, gentiles would learn the whole law and would desire to keep it to please God and do what Yeshua had commanded. Jews who had come to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah would already know the law, thus they were learning a new way through Yeshua to receive the grace of God when they violate it. Gentiles who were receiving grace would learn the law so they could walk in the newness of life that God had written down as a blessing for all people.

As it pertains to the subject matter today, the instruction of God given to Moses, the Torah, the law, the Pentateuch—all of these terms mean the same thing—has a lot to say about sexual immorality, and I think it's important to recognize that the Apostle used the term porneía to generally refer to all of these instructions. It's also important to recognize that Torah is God's love letter to all of mankind, which was to be brought to the whole world through the Jews, but even more specifically, through Yeshua, who was and is the Jewish Messiah. Even within his judgment, the Apostle James (Yaakov) quoted Amos 9:11-12, which prophesies the resurrection of Yeshua so that gentiles who are called by His name and the remnant of believing Jews could seek the Lord through His example. You can review this in Acts 15:16-17 right before the Apostle's judgment for the new gentile believers. The New Testament here uses a variation of the Septuagint translation of Amos, as follows: "On that day I will raise up the tent of David that has fallen, and I will rebuild its things that have fallen, and I will raise up its things that have been destroyed, and I will rebuild it just as the days of eternity, so that the remnant of the people, and all the nations upon whom my name was invoked upon them will search for me,' says the Lord who is making these things." This tabernacle of David is not the Temple, however, but the very Body of Christ that would be crucified and then risen from the dead so that all people could follow Him into eternal life. To give you clarity, consider Yeshua's own prophesy that ties directly into this from John 2:19-22 when He responded to criticism from the Jewish leaders: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said." Yeshua, you see, has now brought God's love letter to all people, just as prophesied, and thus through faith we ought to follow Yeshua by mimicking His love of Torah. After all, He has said to us, "If you love me, keep My commandments" as recorded in John 14:15.

Now, I've stated a few times that the Torah is God's love letter to His people, but let me explain a little bit more about what I mean by this. Yeshua said the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength," and the second is to "Love your neighbor as yourself." To love the Lord is to keep His commandments, but this explains only how we love the Lord and His letter that He wrote for us. How do these instructions show God's love for us, though? In Deuteronomy 10:12-13, the Lord says, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the

commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" The commandments of the Lord are meant for our good. In other words, if we follow them, we will live the best life possible—if not in this world, then in the next. These commandments are meant to foster the good life, to bring about the most joy, to encourage love toward God and love toward one another. If we follow these commandments, not only will it be for our good, but for the good of everyone around us. There is one other verse to bring into the equation, and that is Genesis 1:31. In the very beginning, after God had created everything He was going to create, we read a very important verse: "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." God's commandments were embodied in the creation He made, and they were given to us as the natural law that would lead to the outcome that God designed, which was "very good."

Three more things to further tie things together: 1) God loved us so much that He gave us a free will so that we could choose the good He had prepared for us or not, because He wanted us to build a relationship that was built on love by choice. In other words, He didn't want to create us as creatures who were forced to worship Him, but rather as creatures who would come to know Him and love Him on account of His glory, 2) God, being perfect and holy, would not accept a people that rejected His goodness, and all who sinned would be condemned to die, and 3) God loved us so much that He sent His Son into the world so that all who believed in Him would not perish but would be forgiven their sins and inherit eternal life with God. As part of this belief is a desire to follow Him and do what He commanded, for James has made clear in his epistle that even the demons believe in God, and tremble, but our life following Messiah Yeshua is alive and can be verified when we actually do the same works that He did; when we love Him, we will obey His commandments.

Of course I want to emphasize that the Saints of God keep the commandments of God and the faith in Yeshua, according to Revelation 14:12, but my point in bringing this up is that we do injustice to the Word of God if we interpret God's law in any way that does not reflect the love of Yeshua. The love of Yeshua is the very key for unlocking the meaning of Scripture. This is the living and powerful Word, sharper than any two-edged sword that helps us to discern between right and wrong within the thoughts and intents of our hearts. This is the Word that ought to be interpreted in Spirit and in Truth so that we can Worship God in the True form that Yeshua showed us. So when we interpret Torah, it is critical that we read it through the prism of love.

That being said, let's jump in to some of the more controversial Torah passages relative to sexual morality. Most of these come from our Torah readings this week, but one of them is going to come from an earlier passage.

First, let's look at Deuteronomy 21:10-14, which reads: "When you go out to war against your enemies, and the Lord your God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. She shall put off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. And it shall be, if you have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because you have humbled her."

Our modern sensibilities may read the plain English translation of this with revulsion, but remember what the Apostle Paul said, "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Let's look at the Spirit of God in this passage. The people who are conquered here are enemies, meaning that they do not believe in the One True God; they either follow after false gods or demons, or they do not believe in any god at all. Now in the times Moses wrote this Scripture, these verses surely refer to some form of military battle, but the key here is that the Lord has given these people into the hands of Israel. Perhaps these people will have the opportunity to come to know the One True God on account of their captivity? Considering that trusting God and keeping His commandments is a prerequisite for eternal life in God's Kingdom, Israel would be instruments of God's mercy on these people considering that in this example they are taken captive rather than annihilated. But let's take this section into the modern day. The Lord has commanded us to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them the commandments of God. If the Lord gives a nonbeliever into the hands of a believer, this means that the Lord Himself has sent His Holy Spirit to convict the nonbeliever to come into the faith. If a nonbeliever becomes captive to the faith, this is a blessing indeed.

As we read on, we see there is a beautiful woman among the captives, and the man of Israel, a believer, desires her and wants to take her as a wife. Let's take a step back here and consider what it means to be a believer. As we've covered, a believer is not to practice sexual immorality, even upon first coming into the faith. It's so important for a believer to practice sexual purity, in fact, that no virtue is mentioned more in Scripture

than perhaps purity of religious worship; meaning that only Yahweh ought to be worshipped and no other god ought to be worshipped beside Him. Let's look at a few commands the Lord puts into this verse. First of all, you shall take her into your house and remove the clothes of her captivity. If you look at the Hebrew here, it's really referring to the mantle of her captivity, or her position as a captive. In other words, the man is commanded to make it very clear to this woman that she is in his house voluntarily, that he is courting her, and that there ought to be no force involved in the scenario. To further show this as an accurate interpretation, consider that if the man has no delight in her, he "shall set her free," "shall not sell her for money" and "shall not treat her brutally." In other words, she's not a slave. She's a free woman. She's not to be treated as an object. That being said, we have to back up and look at the more difficult parts to interpret. We can see in the text that the man is to give the woman, with shaven head and trimmed nails, a month to mourn her father and mother before making her his wife by sleeping with her, and then we see that if the man has no delight in her, he's to set her free and not treat her poorly because he has "humbled her." There's so much to unpack here. First of all, the mother and father may or may not be dead. The idea that she is mourning them doesn't mean that they were slaughtered, it means that she is considering the idea of leaving her father and mother and clinging to her husband, as the Lord commanded way back in Genesis. Now don't get me wrong, they may be dead, but I'm telling you they don't have to be. This month of courtship is meant to help the man and woman both determine whether they would make a suitable couple. Secondly, by shaving her head and trimming her nails, it simply means that she is purifying herself of her past practices, perhaps pagan in nature, and starting over with the idea that she may be grafted-in to Israel to worship Yahweh.

Two other points: 1) What does it mean, "If you have no delight in her?" I can tell you straight up what I don't believe it means; I don't believe it means that the man of Israel doesn't enjoy their intimate encounter. What is the nature of our God? According to Exodus 34:6-7, He is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty..." Here, God is explaining that the man, after courting this woman for a month, does not believe she would make a suitable wife and therefore does not delight in her. Perhaps she still holds onto her pagan practices? Perhaps she doesn't have an interest in him? Maybe she has failed to establish a true faith in Yahweh? What man wants to be unequally yoked with a mate that is going to lead him astray from the Lord? No man of God, that's for sure. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, we read, "Do not be unequally yoked together

with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.” 1 Corinthians 7 goes through a whole host of ideas that a man and a woman ought to consider prior to marriage, but if they can’t resist their sexual urges, they ought to marry. I don’t think there’s any different message here in Torah. If the man doesn’t delight in the woman, there has been no sexual relationship as of yet. His duty is to let her go free and clear without any harsh treatment at all. 2) But what about the explanation that the man has humbled her, and this is why he should not sell her for money or treat her brutally, but rather set her free. The word for humble here means afflicted. Remember, she was part of a group that was taken captive and now the man and woman are in a one-month period determining if they are going to work together as a couple. This is a humbling experience for her even without any sexual union. The whole scenario represents a great mercy of God, for only if they delight in one another is there to be any marriage and sexual union. The Scripture is written from the man’s perspective, but the woman’s rights are considered here also, and this marriage, if it works out, would be a great mercy for this woman. If this woman were to marry into a house of Israel and come to have true faith in Yahweh, by the grace of God she would be grafted-in to Israel and have the opportunity to live with God in His Kingdom.

In a modern context, perhaps a man might court a non-believing woman and bring her into the faith prior to their marriage. When he is satisfied that she truly believes, the man might marry the woman and enter a covenant relationship with his spouse and with God. This is a beautiful thing. If she doesn’t come into the faith, then the believing man ought not to marry the woman for it is also commanded that we are not to be unequally yoked. Yet, she is to go free without any hard feelings, and she certainly shouldn’t be sold into slavery. I’d like to think that goes without saying in today’s world, but the Lord put this into His Word for a reason, and today’s world has much more darkness than I’d care to speak about today. God’s instruction doesn’t allow for any kind of depravity.

In a prophetic sense, this section also sets up a template for gentiles being grafted-in to Israel through Messiah Yeshua. The faith must be voluntary, and our Messiah must delight in us in order for us to be brought into His kingdom. Our faith is certainly an essential part of the equation, but if we go around practicing lawlessness, we have already covered the fact that our Lord will not delight in us and will tell us to depart. While one might walk away from the Lord according to his or her own free will, being

outside the House of the Lord is not a place we want to be. It is a mercy indeed for the bridegroom to find delight in His bride, and for the bride to make herself ready for Him.

If we skip ahead to Deuteronomy 22:13-21, we can see another scenario where a man takes a wife from Israel and then comes to “detest her.” If you want to look at this from a modern standpoint, here we’re talking about two believers caught in a bad marriage, where one or both of them are not happy in it. The example in Torah gives two examples, one with the husband being at fault, and the other with the wife being at fault. Sadly, this can happen in any marriage, and I think this is just painting the picture so we know the Lord’s will, and His will is very consistent throughout Scripture. There is much clarity provided in the New Testament on both scenarios. Allow me summarize one at a time.

In the first scenario, the husband claims the wife was not a virgin when they married and brings the matter to the elders, but he is found out to be a liar. In fact, the woman’s father produces evidence that the woman was indeed a virgin on their marriage day. As a result, not only does the husband have to pay the father of his bride a fine for falsely accusing her, he also must remain married to her for life. We can see this scenario explained in Matthew 19:3-6, where we read that the Pharisees came to Yeshua to test Him and asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce a wife for just any reason?” Yeshua’s answer is based in Torah: We read, “And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” Paul gives a very similar teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, where he writes, “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.” This is sexual purity.

In the second scenario from Deuteronomy 22, the Lord presents an opposite case, where the husband accuses the wife of sexual immorality and this time she’s guilty; she has played the harlot in her father’s house. The result is unpleasant to consider from a worldly perspective, but I want you to think of this as a spiritual punishment. When the elders find that the wife is not a virgin, she is to be stoned with stones so that evil is put away from Israel. There are three New Testament stories that help us interpret this scenario according to the Holy Spirit. As Matthew 19 continues into verses 7-9, we read that the Pharisees asked, “Why then did Moses command to give

a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" [Yeshua] said to them, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.' The conclusion from this section is similar to the section above: God wants us to treat marriage as a binding covenant that cannot be broken; however, sexual immorality is a cause to break off a marriage, if we were to fall into such depravity.

In the second New Testament scenario, the Pharisees catch a woman "in the very act" of adultery, as we read in John 8:1-11, and they bring her before Yeshua to stone her. Ultimately, Yeshua tells the Pharisees, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." All of them walk away leaving the woman alone with Yeshua, who tells her, "go and sin no more." This story reflects the grace offered through Yeshua when the sinner has a truly repentant heart, something we have to infer here from the text, but it also offers a look at the hypocrisy that can result from a partial adherence to the letter of the law. In Deuteronomy 22:22, we read, "If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel. Notice again from John 8:4, the Pharisees say to Yeshua, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act." Why did the Pharisees bring only the woman before Yeshua for judgment? What happened to the man? Was He among the accusers? We don't know, ultimately. However, Yeshua here is showing the importance of impartial judgment, for the Pharisees had mercy on the man, but not on the woman, and thus made themselves guilty of violating Deuteronomy 1:17, which reads, "Show no partiality in judging." In any case, all three parties are offered grace in this situation, the woman, the man as well as the Pharisees, who were certainly not without sin. Which of the three parties was most grateful, do you think, of the mercy? I believe the woman caught in adultery walked away and truly sinned no more, just as Yeshua commanded her. I'm not sure about the others. Importantly, this story gives us an understanding that we ought to be slow to judgment when dealing with other brothers and sisters in the faith, especially when they are repentant.

In the third New Testament scenario from 1 Corinthians 5, a story we've covered often, we see that a man has taken his father's wife in violation of Deuteronomy 22:30. Paul doesn't parse words, quoting directly out of Deuteronomy, he writes, "put away from yourselves the evil person" indicating that we ought to judge members within the church by excommunicating them, a form of stoning, when they commit grievous

sexual immorality such as this without repentance. However, as you can see in the text, Paul also wrote that the church ought to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus.” In other words, by excommunicating the person from the church and giving them the unpleasant experience of separation from the community, the conviction they could develop in their heart may lead them to repentance so they can be welcomed back into the community, which is ultimately what happens in this scenario according to 2 Corinthians 2. However, if this person had not repented, they would indeed be delivered over to Satan rather than saved in the day of our Lord Jesus. Unrepentant sin amounts to practicing lawlessness, and the Lord has indicated in Matthew 7 that He will not allow such people to enter His Kingdom. The death penalty that we see in Torah prophetically represents this second death; the second death of unrepentant sinners. The Lord does not will this for anyone; rather, He wills that we repent, that we turn and live, and this again is why He came. Nevertheless, He will allow us to walk the path of our own choosing; repentance unto faith and obedience to God for eternal life or rebellion and disobedience for eternal death. The choice is up to us.

I want to head back to Deuteronomy and highlight three more scenarios of sexual immorality and how they’re handled by the Lord before we hit our last section in Numbers and close. I’m going to put all three up on the screen and summarize them briefly from Deuteronomy 22:23-29. I want you to see all three at once so you can discern the differences and understand the love language of our Lord. Now that we’ve gone over Yeshua’s desire for mercy and not sacrifice, and we’ve explained again how stoning does not have to be literal, let’s dig in. In the first section from verse 23-24, a virgin woman engaged to a man ends up fornicating with a different man in the community. The text indicates that she did not cry out in the city, and thus both she and the man are guilty and both ought to be put to death. Though the language is archaic, the fact that the woman didn’t cry out means that she did not protest the man’s advances. In other words, she consented to the union; she was into the whole thing. Both the man and woman have essentially committed adultery in this scenario, and without repentance they will both suffer the second death. In the meantime, they both ought to be removed from the community because such sexual sin cannot be tolerated, or it could spread to others. Based on the New Testament story in Corinthians, it is clear that we ought to pray for this excommunicated couple, that they truly repent and are restored in their faith.

In the second scenario, the young man forced the woman to lie with him, a sin akin to murder according to what we read here in Torah. According to the text, the woman is

innocent of sin and only the man ought to be put to death because he has committed what we would call rape. Torah is very harsh in its punishment of this sin, and calls for an actual physical death penalty for the man, likening his rape of the woman to taking a life, and I'm going to leave that interpretation right there because I personally don't believe the New Testament would treat this sin any differently. This is a law of love for the woman who was harmed.

In the third scenario, the woman and man are both unattached but they fornicate and are discovered. While the language in Torah may make it seem like the situation is forceful by using the words "...he seizes her and lies with her," it is not, for the next words are "and they are found out," suggesting that they were both involved in the act. Additionally, there is no indication whether the woman protested the act or not as there is in the other two scenarios. While it's likely that this act of fornication would be considered "sexual immorality" that new Christians should not engage in, the solution to it is a little more graceful. In modern language, we'd call it a shotgun wedding, but Torah is quite specific about the consequences: the couple must get married, the husband is to pay his bride's father 50 shekels in case something happens to him so he can take care of her, sort of like a life insurance policy, and the couple is not permitted to divorce as long as they live. This is a mercy that protects sexual purity in marriage, despite some bad choices that were made.

As we contemplate the implications of these three scenarios, I think it's important to understand that God does not want us to engage in any sexual immorality at all, and He has made this clear throughout the whole of Scripture. We must put sexual immorality of all kinds behind us when we come into the faith. There is no exception to this. As Yeshua said in Matthew 19 when questioned by the Pharisees, God instructed Moses concerning some of these matters in Torah on account of sin. Yeshua said that God permitted divorce on account of sin—the sin of sexual immorality—but He didn't intend for His creation to need these concessions. He intended for us to be good, to love Him and to keep His commandments. The implication is that our Lord does not want us to sin, but He makes provisions for us to find our way back to Him if we do. He wants our hearts to pursue Him in all of His ways. To sinners whom He has healed through His gift of grace, He has said, "go and sin no more." And we know that those who do not listen to this exhortation, but rather "practice lawlessness" will have no hope of salvation.

We might look to Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 again, where the Apostle expresses great disappointment that a member of the church has committed sexual immorality with his

father's wife, and this gives us a feel for the Lord's disappointment in us when we do fall in this way. This type of sexual sin didn't even happen amidst the pagans of Paul's day. How could this be happening in the church? What would Paul say about the sexual depravity we see in society today? What about within the church? What would he say about his countrymen who have perverted God's Word to support pedophilia or those who actually practice such things? While all sin, when practiced without repentance, leads to death, I think some sins may lead to a more precarious spiritual place and maybe even death in this life as well as spiritual death. I leave judgment to the Lord and I can't say anything definitive on the matter, but what I can do is point to the Lord's words in Matthew 18:6-7, where we read, "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" I do not want my Lord to say "woe" to me or anyone I know at any time. And yet, I know the Lord calls us to examine ourselves and search out our ways so we can repent and return to the Lord, no matter how far we have fallen. So long as a sinner has air to breathe, I think each one ought to change course and obey the Lord. Is there really any other option? Is there any other way to live?

That being said, I must address one more section of Scripture that has been perverted and taken out of context, and that is in Numbers 31. In this chapter, Israel had just destroyed the people of Midian because they sent their women to practice cult prostitution with some of the men of Israel in an effort to destroy God's people. After the men of Israel returned from battle with captives from Midian, Moses grew angry at the men for bringing back the very same women who had previously tempted them. Moses ordered Israel to wipe out the women and their boys, who might exact revenge later against the nation if left alive, but in verse 31:18, Moses added, "keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately." I've addressed this in passing before, but I have to address it one more time on account of how horribly this passage has been misinterpreted in various religious writings. First of all, if you look at the Hebrew, this translation is not all that precise. What the verse is saying is that Israel ought to have mercy on the young girls they brought back from their battle with Midian and let them live. The whole of Scripture makes it abundantly clear that the men of Israel were not to marry these young girls or sexually abuse them, as some perverted interpretations have suggested. These girls were meant to be taken as servants, and we can even look to the example of a pagan nation to see this.

Read 2 Kings 5:1-4, where “Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper. And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman’s wife. Then she said to her mistress, ‘If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy.’ And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, ‘Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel.’” I wish I had more time to get into this story in more detail, but here we see a young girl from Israel taken captive by the Syrians, a pagan nation. This girl, who served the commander’s wife in her quarters, was so well cared for as a servant that she loved her captor and sought to heal him using her knowledge of God’s prophet in Israel. If a pagan nation had this kind of mercy toward their captive girls, then God’s people who He was bringing up into the Promised Land surely practiced this same mercy. This same type of servanthood that we see in the servant girl under Naaman’s wife is what Moses commanded the men of Israel to do with the young girls from Midian.

I think as this world gets more and more perverted, and the sins of those around us multiply, even within some of the churches and synagogues that used to be beacons of hope, it’s important that we hold true to Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 5:11; namely, “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” The Lord has called us out of sin and into His marvelous light. He has called us to repentance, for we are not without sin. But we cannot practice sin and repent over and over of the same sin, and we cannot continue in sin without repentance. We must flee from sexual immorality, flee from idolatry and flee from any other sin that the Lord has prohibited, for He desires what is good for us, and we ought to seek Him and the good that He desires for us with all of our hearts, so that we can be with Him when He comes. Shabbat shalom.

