Only the best for the Lord (Exodus 22:28-31)

The Apostle Peter reminded his readers that they were a chosen people (cf 1 Peter 2:1-17). They were to be set apart from the world and the evil desires that had characterized their previous lives. One of the benefits which we gain from the Old Testament law is insight into how that holy lives looks.

I. ***Speak respectfully about divine authority (22:28).***

A. Divine authority includes both God and the authorities which God has appointed.

"God" correctly translates the word here (cf. Leviticus 24:14-16). A "ruler", either a tribal chief or king, had been set in place by God. See Romans 13:1; Daniel 4:32. People of God acknowledge a <u>divine</u> authority not only in God but in His established human leaders.

B. Accordingly God forbids the blaspheming of God and the "cursing" of the ruler.

"Blaspheme" (NIV) is the same word translated "curse" in Exodus 21:17 and means to make light or, in this context, to treat with contempt. Any word (or action) which detracts from or "lightens" the glory of God is cursing or, as translated here, "blaspheming" God.

To "curse" someone, as used in the latter portion of verse 28, meant to call upon a supernatural power to do evil to that person. No one was to call upon God to do evil or bad to the ruler, lightly or in earnest.

God desires that His people respect His authority in how they <u>speak</u> about that authority. Unfortunately, not only the world but even professing Christians "lightly" use "God" as an exclamation or filler word. Rulers are not only spoken of disrespectfully but also "cursed." Instead, we should be praying for and interceding for all those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1). To speak respectfully of God and human authorities will set you apart from the world around you in the proper way.

II. ***Give the best to God (22:29–30).***

The nation of Israel belonged to God because He had brought them into existence and also redeemed them out of slavery. Therefore God claimed for Himself Israel's best: of their harvest and their firstborn.

A. *Give the best of the harvest.*

The difficult phrase which the NIV renders as "your granaries and your vats" probably refers to the richness of the harvest and the pressing of the grapes when rich with juice. The command "don't hold back" has more the idea of promptness ("do not delay") than implying that something was withheld. This is the offering of the firstfruits in seed form. At the beginning of the harvest, when the best of the crops were coming in, they were to give a proper portion to God. They were to resist the temptation to give later, inferior crops or to delay in the uncertainty if sufficiently more would come.

B. *Give the first-born of man and animal.*

Both the firstborn son and the firstborn of the cattle and sheep were to be given to God as instructed at the time of the Exodus. The purpose was to remind them that the Lord had redeemed them out of Egypt (Exodus 13:11–16). The firstborn son was the heir. He was considered the sign of the father's strength (*cf.* Genesis 49:3) and a promise of future care in old age. Though given to the Lord, the firstborn was "redeemed."

The firstborn of the cattle and sheep was sacrificed. The sacrifice was an act of trust in God, since the firstborn would have been the start of another generation from which to profit.

Whether of man or animal God wanted the best from His people. He wanted their trust and recognition of being worthy. He wants all of each of His children today, as well, living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). He wants the best of your time, your energies, and all your trust. God's mercies, as developed in Romans 1–11 are the motivation.

III. ***Act honorably for God (22:31).***

A. *Be a holy people*

With the possible exception of 23:19, this is the dietary regulation in the Book of the Covenant. But the intent is not to focus on kosher food, but on what it means to be holy. "You are to be my holy people." The dedication of the firstborn to God was a reminder, but they were also to act as a holy people.

B. *Avoid "unclean" behavior.*

The dietary laws (and other laws of cleanness) which could later in Leviticus contrasted holy and common, clean and unclean. The food regulations were regular, symbolic reminders thereof. An animal killed by a predator in the field would have been unclean and still with the blood. But the intent of such laws were not for health reasons, but for teaching (cf. Mark 7:19). God's people were to act with a certain decorum or dignity and not eat that which was only fit for dogs.

There are distinctions between spiritually clean and spiritually unclean. We, as children of God, should live in a manner that is spiritually "clean" and pure.

The purpose of daily, holy living, is to "declare the praises of him who you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9 *NIV*). How we speak respectfully about God and the authorities He has established, how we give the best back to God, how we act in honorable, upright ways, it all points to God and His greatness. It gives Him glory. It sets us apart from the world.

We are not our own. We have been bought with a price. Therefore, we honor God with our bodies – with our entire lives.

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