

Stoning the Rebellious Son

Deuteronomy 21

¹⁸ If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them:

¹⁹ Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place;

²⁰ And they shall say unto the elders of his city, "This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard."

²¹ And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shall you put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

If rebellious sons weren't so common in our day, and we hadn't become so sentimentally soft (ruled by our feelings in all things), this law wouldn't seem so harsh. It was designed to curb the destruction of family respect and order, upon which society is built. The severity of the law shows the importance of the maintenance of family order.

Notice also that the particular sins that mark the son as "stubborn" and "rebellious", besides from not obeying his parents, is gluttony and drunkenness. Both are the result of unrestrained appetite, which shows how important these areas of life are. Eating and drinking, if not controlled, are the doors to destruction. Therefore, God often instructed parents to raise their children in temperate diet habits (Samson and John the Baptist are examples), knowing that self-control in these areas was critical to righteousness. It is no wonder then, in our day, that Satan is promoting gluttony and drunkenness everywhere, so as to render the race incapable of appreciating God's Law.

In bringing the rebellious son to justice, the parents were made responsible for bringing such a son into the world.

Where their weakness had allowed such a thing to develop, they were now required to bring the works of their hands to judgment. It was as much a punishment for them, as for the son.

The use of “stones”, like any corporal punishment, seems brutal and harsh to us. But this was a common method of punishment in those days, and the only reason Israel used corporal punishments, like the sword, at all, was because they picked them up after the Red Sea. God never instructed them to gather swords, and they were unarmed when they faced the Red Sea.

The New Testament way of dealing with rebels in the church, is to separate from them, and “deliver them up to Satan.” If the church is truly led by God, then their separation from the sinner is ratified in heaven (“whoever sins you retain they are retained in heaven.”) Heaven’s protection and grace, are to a degree removed from such a person, so that they hopefully learn by having the consequences of their sins visited upon them. If their rebellion extends beyond the church and affects society, then the “sword of the state” will punish them eventually.

This was precisely what happened to old Jerusalem in Christ’s day. The Spirit of God was removed, the church separated itself from her, and eventually the Romans punished her rebellion with death.

One of the problems in our families, is that because of our own indulgence in sin and self-serving, we are unable to draw firm lines for our children. Therefore, when they become rebellious, we have no power to restrain them, and then think that a sentimental love will somehow “bring them back.” But they usually despise this and just take further advantage. Not having learned to appreciate and respect the authority of just law, they have no appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf. Emotional appeals are powerless to move them.

The Law, which should have been a schoolmaster to them to lead them to Christ, was withheld, and now they despise the offer of salvation.

I've seen children like this today, and they are very hard to deal with. The state is even involved in this softness and often protects the rebellious children, which only encourages them more.

With this kind of disrespect for authorities, and human life in general, being inculcated at the family level, it is not surprising when people pull guns in the middle of crowds and let loose.

But the root and ground of this problem is found in how people relate to the Law of God. The circumstances by which the "curses and blessings" are administered may have changed, but the law is still in effect. Those who obey will be blessed, those who disobey will be cursed.

And those who denigrate the Law, or who teach that it is impossible to obey, also bring the curse of the Law upon their society. Anything that lessens the force of the Law brings a curse.

The Law exposes sin, and therefore brings condemnation. And the Gospel removes the sin, and therefore brings healing. They work hand-in-hand.

But today, the gospel is often misrepresented as a sentimental love that overlooks sin, or that negates the power of the Law. Such a gospel is like a foolish mother who spoils her children behind the father's back. Such a mother would eventually reap a bitter harvest in disobedient and disrespectful children. And such a mother are the churches of our land today.

Proverbs 26

² The curse causeless will not come.