

The Levite's Concubine

I am a Levite living in the hills of Ephraim. My story is disturbing in many ways, but I guess there is benefit in its telling, if only to illustrate how far evil can go. Where does the story start? Moses wrote, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Then he wrote, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." And finally, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

That description of the Creator's pattern is one woman and one man permanently becoming one flesh. It does not allow for more than one of each sex or two of one sex in the relationship and does not permit attributing inferior status to either partner. Do things go wrong when this is ignored? I can tell you of my situation and how these principles were violated.

I had a concubine, basically a wife below my class – not a Levite. She left me to return to her father in Bethlehem – that constituted "unfaithfulness" and I went to get her back. I probably had not treated her right. I met her father and he accepted me and invited me into the home. It appeared that everything had been resolved and we got ready to leave. He then kept asking me to stay a little while longer. This continued for a total of about three days. You might call it "the long Bethlehem goodbye."

After a late start heading for my home in the hills of Ephraim, it was getting toward evening when we arrived at the city of Jebusites and I did not want to stay among aliens. It almost certainly would have been better, but I did not know at the time. In Gibeah we prepared to camp in the city square when an old man, returning from his fields, strongly advised against our staying there. He invited us into his own home and showed all the usual hospitality.

Then while we were having a good time, the unthinkable happened. Some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him."

That shocked me. It wasn't part of my culture although I had heard of such things in the pagan temples. But the next part was even worse! The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and my guest's concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don't do such a disgraceful thing."

Note that our host was willing to sacrifice his own daughter as well as my concubine. That is not how you should treat a person created in the image of God! But I did not oppose him when he sent my concubine outside to be abused by those men. I guess I thought that they would not find her to their taste. She was found in the morning, dying on the doorstep.

I put her on my donkey and headed home but when it became clear that she was dead, I went crazy and cut her body into pieces and sent them around the country. That got people's attention! They said, "Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt!" I knew that it had happened in Sodom in the days of Abraham.

When the people heard the whole story there was a great outrage. The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What about this awful crime that was committed among you? Now surrender those wicked men of Gibeah so that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel." But the Benjamites would not listen to their fellow Israelites.

So, we had a major war and the tribe of Benjamin was nearly wiped out, including women and children. Anger led to a hasty vow to the LORD by the rest of the men of Israel. "Not one of us will give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite." But when there was time for reflection a great remorse spread through the nation that an entire tribe would be missing. Hasty decisions, thoughtless actions!

So, what came next? Another war to provide wives for the surviving Benjamites! It was decided to get wives from the town that had not participated in the battle -- Jabesh Gilead. Everyone from that town except young virgins were exterminated, but that turned out to only provide 400 of the 600 needed wives. Then, to avoid breaking the vow, the wifeless Benjamites were allowed to kidnap a few more at the annual festival of the LORD in Shiloh to make the quota.

What an incredible tangled mess and senseless loss of life growing out of a series of sinful acts. And there were also consequences of many seemingly inconsequential decisions. When the Creator and the Law are forgotten, the results are chaos because the human heart is evil, covered only at times with a thin veneer of respectability. I did not value my wife as an equal reflection of the image of God. She reacted by returning to her father. He kept on delaying our departure, perhaps reluctant to be separated from his daughter again but it led to my not arriving home before nightfall. The hospitable old man in Gibeah valued me but not women in general and had a strange concept of morality.

There is no safety in human schemes that ignore strict adherence to the Law. My countrymen, including many Levites, say, "Would that we had a king." But perhaps that is not the solution unless the king also follows the Law.

Judges 19 - 21