

BIB103 OT1: Creation and Covenants

Unit 5b Practical Aspects of Worldview

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John: So we've talked a lot about the doctrine of man, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of sin. And it's important that we understand the Pentateuch, the theological foundation that's there, and how God used the Pentateuch not as what we've mentioned many times, an irrelevant book to kind of capture this small segment of society way back in whenever type situation.

George: Right.

John: The ramifications of those doctrines and what was established there are felt in our world today, not only in our worldview, but in the way that we see real life being lived out. What are some ways that you're seeing that and that you see the tie-in between those things in the culture that we live?

George: Yeah. It's interesting that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

John: Yeah.

George: Right? And mankind is still mankind.

John: Right.

George: God's word is still God's word. Culture, no matter where you are on the planet, still bears many of the characteristics that the culture back in the days of Genesis did.

John: Yeah.

George: Right? And so I see so many practical teaching kinds of things and things that we need to challenge our people to live by right in the Pentateuch. When we go back to that theological principle we just briefly touched on in an earlier talk was this concept of man created in God's image.

John: Right.

George: Well, so what? Who cares? How do you make that really practical to people today?

John: Right.

George: Well, that one theological concept alone gives us the basis for all kinds of things that speak to, all kinds of hot button issues in our day.

John: Yeah.

George: So we talk about marriage, the definition of marriage, man and woman. This flies in the face of the same sex marriage movement and all of those other things. And while we're certainly not here to

hate other people as we're often accused of doing, we need to be careful, obviously, not to do that. And yet it is very appropriate to call people to account for what God has established from the beginning. So I think in our culture, that issue, the issue of marriage, the fundamental principles are laid out in the Pentateuch for us.

John: Right.

George: Not just Genesis 1 and 2, but even some of the Levitical laws in the Book of Numbers, and even Deuteronomy, as the law is repeated, you find standards and parameters and, yes, punishments as well for sin. But on the more positive side, you find what God intends marriage to be.

John: Right. Yeah.

George: And the purity of it and the holiness of it. And when we fail in those areas, it brings us to a place where we see how destructive those failures can be.

John: Absolutely. Yeah.

George: Why does God spend so much time on it? Because he's just a real stickler about marriage and he's not about other things? No. He spends a lot of time on it because he knows that when marriages go bad or when people fail in their marriages, it's devastating.

John: Right.

George: So when we see that in our culture today, we shouldn't be surprised since we have strayed away from God's definition and God's plan for marriage.

John: Yeah.

George: Another practical point to make within the theology of the Pentateuch as an implication of man being made in God's image is the whole idea of the sanctity or the value or the preciousness of human life.

John: Right.

George: All human life.

John: Right.

George: So in our culture today, we think of the issue of abortion, and that is, that there is nothing more vitriolic, it seems, in our banter in our culture than pro-life versus pro-choice versus this or that. And again, man being made in God's image means that God has a special place for man. And coming out of the flood narrative and God's redemption of Noah and his family and the standards he sets forth there in Genesis 9, it's very clear that human life is sacred and we should not be messing with it in this way.

John: Right.

George: We do not have the right to take a life just because this life is inconvenient for us.

John: Right.

George: Or even, dare I say, if this life presents a danger to us, to the mother. And while I could never ever identify with a woman who finds herself in a situation of an unplanned, unwanted pregnancy for any host of horrible reasons, and while I would never want to lay down some law in front of this person and walk away, but we need to help people through these things, don't we?

John: Right.

George: We need to teach them that because we are created in God's image, all life is valuable.

John: Right.

George: And we need to try to help and support these people to carry this life with them and support them in their decisions afterward.

John: Right.

George: And not just preach at them and yell at them and tell them the truth, but to really get involved in their lives.

John: And that leads to end of life.

George: Absolutely.

John: If I don't value the beginning of life, I don't value the end of life.

George: Yes. And if we don't value the end of life, then we get into assisted suicide and euthanasia and all kinds of things.

John: Right.

George: I had a person tell me several months ago. I won't name names, of course.

John: Yeah.

George: But it was very striking. A young man who was clearly not a believer, but he was lamenting how many of the baby boomer generation are living longer and longer, and how social security and some of the things in our culture will not be enough to sustain that many people at the end of life. And he told me this. He said, "George, we're going to have to make some very hard decisions on what to do with those people."

John: Wow.

George: I couldn't believe what I was hearing, you know?

John: Yeah.

George: I mean, when we think of killing off people at the end of life, for what? The economic betterment of our society, or convenience, or because we can't afford nursing homes?

John: Right.

George: That conversation I had was quite scary. I was shocked he said that. And I tried to question and say, "Did you really mean what I thought you were implying?" And he's like, "Well, for the good of everybody, we may have to do some of these things."

John: Right.

George: I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

John: And both of those, talking about God's definition of marriage and God's definition of the preservation of life in the beginning of life, come down to, in subtle ways, emotionalism gets into that, first of all. "How can a good God...?" rather than seeing God's big picture. And secondly, it puts us in the position, just like Tower of Babel, where we take on God.

George: Yes.

John: We become God when we become the person that can defy marriage, when we become the person that can define the parameters of life, what the quality of life looks like, rather than saying "That's not me. I'm not God. I've got to leave that up to the word of God which God inspired for our use

to be able to dictate the way I should live my life and the way it impacts not only myself but other people.”

George: Right. And nobody said following God’s laws, following God’s created order, following God’s pattern for life and all of these other issues, nobody said that would ever be easy.

John: No.

George: In fact, the Bible clearly teaches that it will only be difficult. But that has nothing to do with the character, purposes, or goodness of God. That has everything to do with the consequences of sin, which by the way, sin was our choice. It was man’s choice. We were not forced into it. So all of these difficulties with the beginning of life emotional issues, with the end of life emotional issues, with definitions of marriage, even gender questions in discussions and all of the difficulties that go with that, we can be very sympathetic with people in the sense that we don’t want to dismiss or downplay or mock the difficulty or even their own passion about the issue.

John: Right.

George: But it’s all because we live in a fallen world. It’s not God’s fault.

John: Right.

George: And God knows that if we would just come back to him, in our society, as a people, if we would just follow him and obey his laws, it is for our good and his glory.

John: And it’s so much about, in a lot of these situations, it’s hard for me to be able to share truth if I’m going into them where I’m about winning an argument. And Christians have to be very mindful of the fact God can stand alone for himself through truth. I need to be a loving voice of truth to them, not in any way negotiating what God says, but also realizing that if I come at people rather than share it, their response to God is between them and God. But we, I think, have gotten into almost this hostile environment as Christians where we’ve even redefined apologetics to make it more about an argument against, where again, God, in the Pentateuch and others, lays out these foundational things not for me to have to argue about, but for me to be able to have discussions. But I don’t have to win an argument. I have to point them back to God.

George: Right.

John: Which leads, I think, to a huge one nowadays where there's a lot of arguments, which is race. And what does the Scripture say in relationship to race?

George: Well, one of the most, dare I say, boring parts of the Pentateuch would be all of those genealogies, right?

John: Yeah.

George: We see all of the descendants, especially in the Book of Numbers when people are being counted and it seems like verse after verse after verse. We're not getting anywhere. We're not really in a narrative mode. We're in kind of just a list of historical facts mode. And it's almost like reading some kind of textbook, if you will.

John: Right.

George: But one of the things that God as creator, man in God's image, and then even in those genealogical sections which are scattered throughout the Pentateuch, one of the things that's very clear is that God has made all of us to descend from one person, or one couple, I should say.

John: Yeah.

George: Adam and Eve. And then again, through Noah and his family. And so I believe very strongly that the biblical worldview teaches us that races don't really exist. There are different ethnicities, to be sure. There are different cultures. There are different people groups. Genesis 11 sort of hints at that with the scattering of the people in the Tower of Babel and the confounding of the languages and people began to populate other parts of the earth and, in doing so, over the course of thousands of years, would of course adopt different customs and patterns and habits and possibly even skin pigmentations and colors and those kinds of things. But from the beginning, we are all one race.

John: Yes.

George: Now, I don't want to say that races (plural), that they don't exist. I don't want to say that as if I'm ignoring the problem of racism. I believe the problem of racism is a horrible thing in our day. And racism, it manifests itself in believers and nonbelievers alike, and sometimes, I'm afraid, almost equally. That's not what I'm saying. But I think the whole discussion of racism is on the wrong platform.

John: Right.

George: Because it's all about my race versus your race.

John: Right.

George: Or can my race get along with your race? And we're not talking about race when we're talking that way.

John: Right.

George: Within the Christian worldview, we're talking about ethnicities. What we're really saying is can my culture get along with your culture? Now, that may not change a lot of the hatred or a lot of the emotionalism behind the discussion, but I think if we set that conversation on that platform as ethnicity and culture versus the color of one's skin, I mean, that should have absolutely nothing to do with any of these discussions.

John: Right.

George: It is simply irrelevant in the pages of Scripture.

John: Right. And it goes back again to God's definition of mankind, God's definition of the fabric of mankind. God never intended for these to become the arguments and the dividers, that tribes will be raced tribes simply because they're not of the same geographical location or didn't have the same genealogical, in their perspective, in their limited one, the same genealogical background there. And it all changes when again we get back to the heart of Scripture which again the Pentateuch lays out where God defines these things in a much clearer way than we a lot of times realize and in a much more relevant way than we really realize.

George: Yes. Yes. And it's important for us as we read the Pentateuch, we need to understand its cultural context. We need to understand who it was written for originally and all of that. We'd never want to deny that.

John: Right.

George: But to make it practical to our lives today, I would challenge anyone studying or reading through the Pentateuch, "make sure you're thinking about the issues of our day."

John: Right.

George: And just challenge yourself. Play a little game, if you will.

John: Yeah.

George: Jot down every time you see something in the first five books of the Bible that you think could speak to a hot topic today.

John: Yeah.

George: Don't even force it. I guarantee you'll come up with more than you could ever handle anyway.

John: Yeah. That's for certain. Are there any other practical things, as we wrap up this section of our talk, that you feel like are relevant there that we want to at least get on the table so that other people could consider them in relationship to where they're at in life?

George: I think when we read the Pentateuch, it can be a little discouraging because a lot of it is hard to understand and, yeah, there are, for lack of a better term, some boring parts to it to plow through. I get all that. But one of the things I would encourage all of us as we study the Pentateuch to pay closer attention to is how gracious God is, and how forgiving he is, how loving he is. The Pentateuch is often portrayed as the law. It's called the law, and rightfully so. It's the book of the law.

John: Right.

George: We have to remember this was God's chosen people's Bible for 1500 years.

John: Yeah.

George: Until the first book of the New Testament, which was probably James or maybe Matthew, this was all they really had. Yes, they had the prophets. And yes, they had poetry and all of that. And that was being written, but their primary text as what we would think of as the Bible today was basically the Pentateuch.

John: Yeah.

George: And they had the writings, but it was all based here. And I think we often think, "Well, this was the law. This is the harsh God. This is the mean God. This is the God who's judging. This is the God who's...he's constantly frustrated." Well, yeah, he is constantly frustrated. But you know what? Time and time and time again, he forgives. He redeems. His providence, we haven't even touched on that in our understanding of God in the Pentateuch. But just look at how he controls world events.

John: Yeah.

George: Look at the miraculous interventions that he performs (the plagues, those kinds of things) just to save his people. But even the non-miraculous. Just how things happen to work out.

John: Yeah.

George: The so-called coincidences.

John: Yeah.

George: Joseph, at the end of Genesis with his brothers, you meant it for evil. God meant it for good.

John: Right.

George: God's love, his grace, his willingness to listen to the prayers of Moses and Aaron. How many times in the Book of Numbers does Moses have to, as it were, plead with God to not entirely destroy the children of Israel?

John: Right.

George: Right? I mean, we get this picture of God, but make sure we get the full picture of God in the Pentateuch, which is very much not just the God of the law but the God of the gospel too.

John: Yes. Yeah. Very true.