



November 13, 2011

Stand for the Lord

Background

Passages

Exodus 32:1-35

Focal Verses

Exodus 32:7-20, 25-26

What This Lesson Is About

This lesson examines Moses' intercession for the Israelites when they committed idolatry, as well as Moses'

passion for the Lord's holiness.

Why This Lesson Is Important

When believers become aware of sins in the church or in the lives of other Christians, they need to be careful in their response. They always should act redemptively and seek restoration; yet at

the same time they must boldly and consistently stand for righteousness.

How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life

This lesson can help you pray lovingly for those involved in sin and yet take appropriate steps to confront sin and uphold righteousness.

Have you ever noticed that it is easier to talk *about* a person than it is to talk *to* the person or to pray for him or her? This especially may be the case if we are angry at the individual, or if he or she has wronged us or has even done something we know to be wrong, even though we ourselves weren't directly harmed. And it isn't always easy to know when confrontation is appropriate.

Even when confrontation *is* appropriate, it usually is difficult. Difficult or not, it sometimes is necessary; and if God's people won't stand for His truth in the world today, no one will. This week's lesson explores the need to uphold God's truth for the glory of God and for the benefit of all.

Intercede on Behalf of Others

Exodus 32:7-14

And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

⁹**And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:**

¹⁰**Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.**

¹¹**And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?**

¹²**Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.**

13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it forever.

14 ^{And} **the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.**

Much had taken place between the events of Exodus 3 (see last week's lesson) and the time of the events recounted in Exodus 32 (see the Sharper Focus article on page 114). Now Moses was an experienced leader. In chapter 32, Moses demonstrated a strong commitment to the Lord and to the people God had placed in his charge.

Moses took Joshua with him and went to the mountain of God, leaving Aaron and Hur in charge of the people. God's glory appeared as a cloud on the mountain. After six days, the Lord called to Moses, and Moses entered the cloud and would remain there forty days and forty nights (see Ex. 24:13-18). No doubt the people watched from afar in fear, trembling, and awe. The last the people knew of Moses, he had entered into what appeared to them as a "devouring fire" (v. 17).

After considerable time had passed and Moses had not reappeared, the people asked Aaron to make representations of "gods" which would "go before" them (32:1). Why Aaron would give in to their suggestions is a mystery, but the consequences of his actions and those of the people are clear (vv. 25-35). Aaron called for the people to give him their gold earrings and rings, and from those he fashioned a golden calf that the people then worshiped. The people had turned their backs on God (see vv. 2-6).

What insights are evident in the above paragraph about the pressure to go along with the crowd?

The Lord told Moses, **Go, get thee down.** And He said He was going to **consume**—destroy—the people and would raise up **a great nation** from Moses. Understand, Moses often had been

the target of the people's complaints and criticisms. As would frequently be the case, the people seemed to be concerned about their momentary situation and forgot all God had done for them. We might say Moses was pastoring a pretty tough congregation.

How do you react toward people who do not appreciate you or who make life difficult for you?

Moses revealed his greatness in his response to God. First, he **besought...God** for the people—he prayed for them. Praying for those who have abused you or made life difficult is not easy, but it is right; Jesus instructed us to do no less (see Matt. 5:44). Second, Moses cared about how the enemies of God might misinterpret God's actions if He destroyed the people. Moses was not concerned about magnifying himself, but about glorifying the Lord.

God repented of His plan to destroy His people. *Would God have destroyed the people? Did Moses' prayer change God's mind? Did God confront Moses with this situation so that Moses would be moved to action, view the people from God's perspective, and pray for them? We may not be able to definitively answer these questions, but we can say two things with certainty. First, God is sovereign. He is the ultimate ruler over all things and is subject to no one. And second, God wants us to intercede for others in prayer. The Lord hears and responds to the prayers of His people (see James 5:16). We do not have to reconcile these two truths. Our responsibility is much more practical. We need to intercede for others and trust God with the results.*

Confront the Sin

Exodus 32:15-20

15 And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written.

16 And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.

Discover Deeper Meaning

The term **wax hot** appears twice in Exodus 32 to refer to Moses' anger (see vv. 19,22); the phrase translates a Hebrew idiom that refers to the expression of anger. But the chapter also speaks of God's anger or wrath in three previous places (vv. 10,11,12). In fact, the same Hebrew idiom is used in all five cases. Here note its use in verse 19 and the actions of Moses that followed.

This Hebrew term conveys the idea of anger with words that literally mean the nose becomes hot or burns. Apparently people noticed the nose dilating when someone was angry. Cases of fierce anger can be characterized by intense breathing through the nose and an emotional fire burning inside; thus the nose became symbolic of anger.

¹⁷And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp.

¹⁸And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.

¹⁹And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.

²⁰And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.

Moses descended from the mountain with **the tables** of the law that held **the writing of God**. Moses was joined by Joshua, who had waited for Moses at the base of the mountain. When **Joshua heard** the uproar coming from the camp, he assumed a battle was taking place. Moses, on the other hand, recognized it was not the sound **of war** but rebellion.

Moses became enraged when he saw the golden **calf** and the behavior of the people, including their sensuous **dancing**. His **anger waxed hot** and he smashed the stone tables, an action probably symbolizing how the people had broken God's law. Moses destroyed the golden **calf** and **ground it** into a **powder** he mixed with **the water**. He then made the rebellious people **drink** the water. The gold would never be recovered!

This is not to say Moses' behavior represents the type of actions we should perform when we become aware of sins in others' lives. We must keep in mind the historical context of these events, that Moses was the leader of his people, and that the people were collectively and flagrantly rebelling against God. At the same time, Moses' concern for the people (see the commentary on p. 91) and his courage are qualities we consistently need to emulate. And we must exercise humility as well (see Gal. 6:1). Moses' humility is evident in the fact he displayed no concern for his own safety or his own future. Would you or **I** have been as selfless?

We live in a time and a culture in which we have many opportunities to take a strong stand for the truth. As believers in Christ, we are obligated to do what is right (see Micah 6:8; James 4:17). Among other things, this means lovingly declaring, in appropriate ways, of course, that homosexuality is wrong, just as is heterosexual sexual activity outside of marriage. It also means upholding traditional marriage and opposing so-called "same-sex marriage." It means opposing abortion and opposing embryonic stem cell research that destroys human life. It means speaking out against efforts to eliminate prematurely the elderly and disabled. And it means sharing Christ with others and clarifying, if need be, that Jesus is not one of many ways to God but the *only* way to God.

These are tough assignments in our day, partly because these are areas in which Satan recently has gained a great deal of ground in the thoughts and attitudes of so many. We must work to recapture this ground for the sake of righteousness and truth, for the benefit of people in society, and for the good of society as a whole.

How can you take a strong stand for what is right and still communicate love at the same time?

Reach Out, yet Remain Anchored

If we are to win people to saving faith in Jesus, then we must associate with sinners and be their friends. However, we will be influenced by those with whom we spend our time, so it is important that our closest relationships encourage us to grow closer to our Lord, not lead us away. *How are you doing with regard to the all-important task of reaching others for Christ? How are you doing with regard to staying accountable to a committed brother or sister in Christ?*

Call for a Return to God

Exodus 32:25-26

25 And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:) _____

26 Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.

As Moses entered the camp, he **saw** the people's rebellion. They were naked;...Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies. *Naked* here means "casting off restraints; letting go." It means "hanging loose" in an immoral sense. The people had abandoned all restraining principles.

Moses called for a clear division among the people. Those who were **on the LORD'S side** were called to stand with Moses. All of the Levites joined Moses. Aaron, even though he had sinned in doing what the people had requested, obviously was among those who repented and joined Moses.

O **What are some ways to challenge people in the church to return to God? How can we effectively encourage non-Christians to come to God?**

Moses related a divine command to the Levites to go through the camp and to kill those who were rebelling against God (see Ex. 32:27). Again, we need to see this passage in light of its historical and national context. The people were at a crossroads. They would either worship the true God or they would bow to idols. Those who refused to turn back to God had to be destroyed or their wicked habits would spread, eventually resulting in the destruction of the entire nation. Three thousand men were put to death that day (see v. 28).

This passage does not give us a pattern for opposing evil; we are never to commit acts of harm or violence, and we certainly are never to kill those who disagree with us about moral issues, sin, Jesus, or anything else. We are to win them just as Jesus attracted the sinners of His day—with love and grace, and with loving yet uncompromising presentations of the truth. We also need to see that this passage is about divine judgment, something God alone is authorized to initiate. Before executing judgment, God gives people ample opportunities to respond to His overtures of goodness and kindness (see Rom. 2:4).

At the same time, the passage does point out the importance of separating ourselves from sin, and of calling on others to do the same (see 1 Cor. 15:33).

The Life Word

It's tough to take a firm stand for truth and still communicate love. With some people, doing this may not be possible, but the real problem is that we all too often say nothing. Or we may state our position in a way that conveys anger or pride rather than true concern. When dealing with a loved one or close friend, you may find it even more difficult to remain calm because you care so deeply. Some of the truths from our lesson this week can help us take the right actions with the right attitude. This week, examine your life for areas where you need to take a stand for Christ and for biblical truth. Then take your stand boldly, yet in love—and leave the results to God.